











**AT THE CROSS- ROADS**

**1885—1946**

**THE AUTOBIOGRAPHY  
OF  
NRIPENDRA CHANDRA BANERJI  
( MASTARMAHASAYA )**

**J I J N A S A  
C A L C U T T A**

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## Introductory Note

Professor Nripendra Chandra Banerji may be regarded as one of the finest products of nineteenth Century Bengal Renaissance. Born in 1885, educated in Dacca and Presidency College, he came in early life under the masterful influence of two of the greatest men that India has produced, Rabindranath and Vivekananda. A born lover of freedom, Nripendra Chandra responded to the call of Gandhiji in 1921, resigned a comfortable position in Bengal Educational Service and braved, fearless and undaunted, the trials and tribulations that came to his lot. Gandhiji continued to be the greatest influence in his eventful political career.

In the front rank of the fighters for independence, Professor Banerji shortly before his passing away in 1949 wrote an autobiography 'AT THE CROSS-ROADS' which summarised the social and political life of the people of Bengal and India between the years 1885-1946. A nonconformist by temperament he was somewhat a misfit in the politics of Bengal of the post-non-cooperation era rendered noisome by ceaseless intrigue, opportunism and insensate fight for power. In the suffocating and immoral atmosphere of the time, Professor Banerji was like a restless spirit "beating in the void his angel wings in vain". In his own way he represented a moral protest against the men and things in Bengal. The purity of his soul and nobility of his purpose were never sullied by the sordid politics of the time. In the field of politics he was double-crossed by some contemporary notabilities. But such was his inherent generosity that he harboured no grievance against any of them.

His contributions as a teacher in the Presidency, Rajshahi, Krishnagore and Chittagong Colleges were not inconsiderable. His honest and transparent personality, his love for the student community and vibrant patriotism attracted many of his pupils very close to him. He dreamt of a new order and often spoke

to them about the necessity for the revaluation of old values. As a journalist Nripendra Chandra rendered two signal services to the country. After non-cooperation was called off Professor Banerji as the chief editor of the *Servant* strove manfully to keep alive the Gandhian ideal of constructive work. As the editor of the *Rangoon Mail* he devoted his facile and forceful pen to the cause of Indo-Burmese harmony as a condition of freedom of both the peoples.

Professor Banerji's autobiography is an honest, faithful and stimulating record of an idealist's life seeking to destroy contemporary jerry-built society and government and bring into existence a new order marked by liberty and equality. As a devoted pupil of Professor Banerji and humble collaborator in the field of politics for some time, I welcome the publication of the second edition of this book because I feel that the study of the book is indispensable for a proper apprasial of Bengal and Indian politics and society during the period 1885-1946. In the present age lacerated by moral discord, Professor Banerji's book might work as a healing balm. Moreover, it will enable the new generations to get a glimpse of the struggle of their forbears for the independence that they have inherited. They suffered so that subsequent generations might live as free men.

I venture to make a suggestion. While congratulating the publisher 'Jijnasa' in their present undertaking, a slightly abridged edition of the first print, I would urge them to publish a Bengali translation of the book which, I have no doubt, would be welcomed not only by the reading public of West Bengal but also by those in resurgent Bangladesh.

**Nirmal Chandra Bhattacharyya**





b. 1885

d. 1949

## PREFATORY

A point comes in everyman's life when he feels that he is 'at the cross-roads'. Life's journey criss-crossed by tortuous zig-zags is not yet finished : but many a mile-stone has been traversed, many a stile crossed, many storms weathered, many a stress overcome. There have been steep ascents and perilous descents, windings and unwindings of the road, until the mind craves for repose, seeks to look back in retrospect and take dispassionate stock of the unbroken and serried past. There has been adventure, there has also been misadventure ; the credit and the debit sides both show large accretions, but there is still a reserve of energy, a yet unexhausted bank of optimism, a will to further work and fight and serve, a longing yet to carry on and carry over. But the lilt of summer is gone: it is the shades of greying autumn that gather with the yellow leaves fallen and falling all around, possibly waiting for a rebirth of the soul after a 'revaluation of values' and for a fresh and final jump !

After sixty, a man normally feels that his life's best work is practically over,—for better, for worse—and that new forces have arisen, 'new races and other minds', with new-fangled 'slogans' who, though unconscious products of the past generations and their hopes and fears, seek everywhere by every means to forswear the links of 'filial piety', who make-believe that the past is as if it never was and that the present, the living and clamant present—has come into being out of vacuum. Look at our own country. I happen to be as old as the Indian National Congress ; for I saw the light of day in the year of the birth of Congress, viz., 1885. I have vivid recollections of all the country has passed through since 1904, when after taking the graduate's degree, we had listened to the pungent Chancellor's Convocation Address by Lord Curzon in the Calcutta University Senate Hall when he had excited the ire of the intelligentsia by his acid references to our 'soda-water bottle effervescences'. Later we passed through the searing 'fire-baptism' of the anti-Partition and Swadeshi movement of Bengal inaugurated in 1905 and carried over and beyond the limits of Bengal till the 'settled fact' of the

Partitioning of Bengal was 'unsettled' at the Delhi *Durbar* of 1912, after 7 years of strife, turmoil, tensions, boycott and governmental repressions. Since then, what see-saws of political, economic and cultural effort have we not seen? Political terrorism, Pan-Islamism of the Aligarh school, constructive Swadeshism, physical culture movements, anti-caste and anti-drink and anti-European-cum-Christian movements, agitations for the emancipation of women and for the liquidation of the pernicious system of bridegroom's dowries, adventures in National Education, a great renaissance of Bengali, Marathi, Gujarati and Hindi languages and literatures, startings of cotton and other mills and of smaller industrial concerns in the earlier days with small result, experiments in insurance and banking mostly ship-wrecked on the sandbanks of inexperience, efforts at revival of cottage industries. To these may be added the Liberal politician's pathetic faith in British good faith and British pledges, the Home Rule Movement led by Mrs. Annie Besant and its aftermath, Theosophy and Sanatanist revivalism, the Ramkrishna-Vivekananda cult transformed into a mighty social service institution, the Ramkrishna Mission with ramifications all over India, and the Far East and England and America, Neo-Vaishnavite cults, Tantrician and the cult of 'Sakti', the social reform movement of the Brahmo Samaj and of the aggressive Aryya Samaj—a revival of Sanskritic and Islamic learning coupled with a stimulus to indigenous medicinal systems. Add to these, the Congress split at Surat and the rise of political activism under the triple lead of Bal-Pal-Lal (*i.e.*, Bal Gangadhar Tilak, Bepin Chandra Pal and Lala Lajpat Rai) till the meteoric emergence of Mahatma Gandhi with his new cult and weapon of non-violent Satyagraha in Champaran in 1917. The thirty years of Gandhism dating from the first successful experiment of Satyagraha and non-violence in the soil of Bihar brings us on the threshold of the modern era.

The next phase : the end of World War I in 1918, the Rowlatt Bill agitation and Jallianwallabagh in 1919, the Khilafat agitation and the tremendous Hindu-Muslim all-India combine leading to the Khilafat-cum-Swaraj movement initiated under Gandhi-cum-Ali Brothers' lead in 1921. Since then much water has flowed down both the Ganga and the Thames, and in the beginning of 1946, India is 'at the cross-roads', when the so-called ideologies of 'violence' and 'non-

iolence' are being weighed finally in the scales. India in 1946 labours for freedom, the fullest freedom, freedom from foreign domination and from poverty and starvation disease and death. But India is at the cross-roads, waiting, reviewing, stock-taking before taking the final jump. The old leadership seems to be losing grip of the fast-moving march of events and cajoles and bullies, moves onward and backward or sits still by turns : *one anchor seems yet to hold : the anchor of Gandhiji fast moored to the fundamental racial heritage of ancient India*—the creed of *ahimsa* and comprehensive love, of good neighbourliness among the world's peoples, of settlement of conflicts of all shapes by mutual forbearance and tolerance—in one word, *the cult of harmony, the first and the last word in Civilisation*. I am a Gandhian, but one who has not been able to indoctrinate himself, body and soul, with the Gandhian theory and practice like some of his ardent disciples in the art of individual and national living. I am an offshoot of the Tilak-Pal-Aurobindo school of 1905 and after : inoculated with strong doses of Vivekananda and Rabindranath Tagore in the beginning of youth and finally baptised in middle age in the streams of Gandhi's mystical Personality. Like Mother India, like India's Congress, I also am at the cross-roads, today—tossed between two divergent ideologies and waiting for the free and open Road to Freedom—for the clear clarion-call of the one Idea.

This is by way of a prefatory explanation of the title of this small volume of reminiscences and recollections, of endeavours and experiments, of success and failures, extending for over half-a-century.

It will be my humble endeavour to present concurrently two facets of life—one, personal, and the other, the impersonal, socio-culturo-political, as far as they have impinged on and directed and shaped the personal life. I honestly hope this presentation may be incidentally a true picture (from one angle) of the Bengal of the last fifty years—an 'impressionistic' pen-picture not over-burdened with data and dates, statistics and mechanical details. At its worst, it will be the story of an educationist who has never accepted the slave-psychology and has tried to shape every endeavour in the mould of Indian independence and self-determination.

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## CHAPTER I

### EARLY YEARS

(1885—1900)

Vikrampur in the Munshiganj sub-division of the Dacca district (the land of my birth) is a peninsular tract of about 300 square miles, washed by the gigantic rivers Padmā on the south and the Meghnā on the east and by the comparatively small river Dhaleswari on the north and the small stream of the Ichhamati on the west and is intersected by small streams and canals which flow out of and into the big rivers. It is the most congested rural area in the whole of India, the population being about 9 *lakhs*. Vikrampur has an old history dating back to the Buddhist age (hundreds of Buddhist images of the earlier and later schools have in recent years been unearthed by archæological scholars and preserved in the Dacca University Museum) and bears to this day its ancient fame of scholarship, culture and daring patriotism. It was here that Dipankar Sri-Jnana, the Buddhist scholar who travelled to Tibet in the ancient days was born : later on it was the home of the Tantric cult of *Sakti* : it was one of the farfamed centres of Sanskritic learning, taking its place alongside Navadwip, Bhatpara and Mithila. In the era of British occupation, it has produced scholars like the late Dr. Aghore Nath Chatterjee, father of Mrs. Sarojini Naidu, and Sir Jagadish Chandra Bose, besides a host of pioneer educationists who made their mark in and beyond Bengal. It was the stronghold of Chand Roy and Kedar Roy of the group of the twelve *Bhuyians* (semi-independent Chieftains under Moghul suzerainty) of Bengal. Vikrampur fought the Arakan Maghs and the Dutch and Portuguese marauders in the 17th and 18th centuries : and in this generation it has produced an outstanding patriot of superlative charity and self-abnegation like Deshabandhu Chittaranjan Das and others of fine calibre, a saintly patriot like Nibaran Chandra Das Gupta, intrepid self-sacrificing workers like Dr. Prafulla Chandra Ghose and Dr. Sures Chandra Banerjee besides thousands of fighting zealots in the cause of Indian Freedom, who have contributed their mite of patriot-service to far-away districts and provinces.

The conditions of life here tend to rear-up a people, hardy and resourceful,—expert boatmen and swimmers who have to hold their own against the incursions of flood when every house is an islet isolated from every other house, when snakes and reptiles and crocodiles infest the entire region, when people's homesteads get under swirling masses of water and a sort of amphibious existence comes into being for months and cottage floors and mud-walls are washed away and people have to improvise temporary *machans* (small sheds on stilts of bamboo and wood) for themselves and their cattle and poultry. Much of it is *char* (built of alluvial deposits on the river bed) land, where sturdy nomadic Muslims and Namasudra Hindus of intense courage in search of land and homestead settle, fight for years against heavy odds and natural impediments and marry and multiply, and make of these regions reclaimed from water, smiling gardens full of vegetation that grow paddy and rice and other crops of the finest variety. Here Muslims and Hindus have lived side by side for endless generations in perfect amity and concord : there have been and are robbers and river-dacoits, but the heart of the people is sound and humane in spite of aberrations. The cultured and virile middle class is the back-bone and the hardy peasantry the muscles and sinews of this wonderful part of Bengal. The beauty of its wide-flowing rivers and streams, the abundance of its ponds and tanks, most of which have an inflow of fresh water and fresh fish during the rains, the wide stretches of its paddy and jute fields where paddy and jute crops have to be harvested often in four or five feet of water, the big and small marts throbbing with life and alert business with thousands of river-craft of all kinds and sizes careering full-sailed along rivers and canals manned by vigilant and cheerful peasant-producers, have only to be seen to appreciate their charm. It is one of the finest and most romantic and adventurous parts of India.

The village of my nativity had been a prosperous village of over three thousand souls, studded with zig-zag watery channels banked by leafy gardens and wild jungle growths (in my grandfather's time leopards and wild boars were trapped or hunted inside the village and men had to travel to neighbouring market-places in strong batches, armed with lathis and spears) which look eerie in the moon-light and send a shiver along the spine in the dark nights and which are a labyrinthine puzzle through which no stranger boats might find their

way at night ! This village was bossed sixty years ago by a few Brahmin and Vaidya families, small landed gentry, of whom my family was one and had a dense population of Muslim and Hindu tillers, of a strong contingent of milk-men, of small traders and of artisans of every shade and colour.

What a transformation in recent years ! Vikrampur—all this garden-plot of Bengal, hoary, full of health and vitality, whose denizens were to be found, after English education and ways had been injected into them, in all parts of India, Burma and the Near East, in all manner of cultured avocations, teaching, doctoring, engineering, law and business—has suffered woeful deterioration first by the incursion of the pest of the water-hyacinth about 20 years back—and what vestige of old glory and material comfort still remained has vanished in the throes of the man-made famine of '42 and '43, which took a toll of a lakh, one ninth of the population !

#### INFANCY AND BOYHOOD

I was born on the 15th of June, 1885 (2nd of *Ashara*, 1292 B.S.) in the village home of my ancestors, (*Madhyapārā*) in the *Vikrampur Pargana* of the District of Dacca in Eastern Bengal on a day of earthquake. The family was one of gentlemen farmers who, in the days of my grandfather, added to the agricultural income by business in Northern Bengal in tobacco, oil, and lending money to peasant-proprietors on security. On the mother's side, I have been told, my grandfather was in affluent circumstances, having been manager of a zemindary estate besides being a small landlord owning several villages on his own account. Both of them were leaders of the rural *samaj* of those days, the maternal grandfather being one of the coterie of leaders of the Brahmin community.

Six decades ago, life in an East Bengal village was self-contained, fairly prosperous and disciplined in manners and conduct. Prices were low, rice selling at approximately two rupees per maund, pulses at about the same rate, and fish and meat, butter and ghee, were plentiful. Vegetables were mostly home-grown. Every family kept an assortment of cows for milk and the necessary contingent of bulls and agricultural implements for farming. All disputes were settled by the village *Panchayat* and hardly any cases short of murder reached the Police and law courts. Every house had its spinning-

wheels plied by women-folk and every village or group of villages had its families of weavers. Lancashire and Manchester cloth and Liverpool salt had not yet been able to penetrate the rural markets, of which there were not a few, and the usual clothing of a respectable village gentleman comprised nothing more costly than 5 or 6 coarse *dhoties* and a *chaddar* with a silk outfit for ceremonial worship and festive occasions and a *shawl* for ceremonial visitings. The ladies were content with home-made *saris* of ordinary texture with a Dacca *sari* and a silk *sari* for luxury. Under-wear, chemises and blouses were luxuries. The village granaries kept full, the tanks were flush with fish and as floods from the big rivers, Padma and Dhaleswari, swept over the country-side for practically five months in the year, catching of fish by various devices and of tortoises (which are very much relished in East Bengal) also was a favourite leisure-time pastime in which the big and small folk joined hands in flotillas of boats.

Gold and silver were not plentiful, currency notes had not yet made their appearance and ordinary sales of commodities for everyday consumption were often by barter. Copper coins and *cowries* were the usual currency in the villages and a man who could produce five thousand silver rupees or a hundred *tolas* of gold from the home-chest was accounted quite rich. The conveyance during the season of floods was by boats, every house-hold owning one or more boats, big and small. During dry months, men took a twenty-mile walk to relatives and friends' homes or to the District headquarters as a normal thing and women were carried on small *palanquins* drawn by couple of sturdy bearers: it was only very rich families who maintained their own *palanquins* and the necessary retinue.

Life was conducted on a community co-operative basis and relations between Hindus and Muslims were of the friendliest; servants, male and female, were treated as junior members of the family and accosted like relations. Very often Hindus and Muslims became almost blood-brothers, participating in each other's religious and social ceremonies and offerings were made by Hindus to Muslim shrines and vice versa. Every village had its *Dharma-gola*, a granary of common use in times of scarcity, and it was a point of honour for the more affluent to look after, cherish and maintain the

less affluent. The weaver, the brass-smith, the milk-producer, the washerman, the fisherman, the barber, the cleaner and sweeper, the potter and the day-labourer and the boat-man, domestic servant—each had his appointed place and fixed perquisites (in the shape of *chakran*, i.e., free tenancy of fixed areas of cultivable land and also of presents in kind and clothing on ceremonial occasions) and the village economy was a self-acting, self-sufficing machinery which kept working on easy, greased wheels. Hospitality was a matter of routine and no guest could be sent away without food and shelter at any time of the day and night.

The village *chandi-mandap* of the richer gentry was the location of the rural school, where the three R's were taught with very little expense. Plantain-leaves, reed-pens, and ink manufactured out of soot-black and one or two printed primers containing lessons also in social etiquette and charity, a book of mental arithmetic (*subhankari*) teaching complex calculations by time-honoured formulæ couched in doggerel verse which could be easily memorised and verbal story-telling from the *Ramayana*, *Mahabharata* and the *Puranas*, supplemented by the telling of folk-tales and hair-raising fairy-stories and demon-stories on evenings by the mothers and grandmothers and aunts—formed the entire paraphernalia of a basic elementary education which stuck and helped the learner to find his way through life as a commoner. The women-folk had their early schooling in the observance of various *bratas* (worship of village deities, or saintly women of legendary fame or of various phases of Nature and of the Seasons), which required habits of early rising before the faintest streaks of dawn, of culling of flowers and holy green grass and *Tulashi* leaves, of early dips in the tanks even in the intensest cold, of lighting of lamps and incense and preparations of sandal-paste—often punctuated with modellings in clay of various kinds of birds, fishes and reptiles, and of deities and of *alpana*.\* These ceremonies had their group worshippers, and they had to memorise and chant *bratakathas*, i.e., legends and stories in homely

\*'Alpana' is the name given to nice designs of leaves and flowers and of birds and beasts and ingenious curves and circles made on the house-flooring and walls by semi-liquid and pounded rice—and have been an outstanding folk-art in Bengal and Orissa. Interesting accounts of these *brata-kathas* and drawings of designs of *alpana* have been published by Abanindranath Tagore and others.

verse, which were full of the aroma of the simple, natural, unsophisticated rural life and the charms and beauties of nature—and were steeped in lessons of heroism, charity and social service and faith in the unseen Power. This was an excellent preparation for the married life or for the life of virginity or widowhood. Sweetness of disposition, physical fitness, a strain of selfless service and modesty and chastity of soul were all imbibed in the process.

The more ambitious and richer boys were sent on to the higher vernacular and middle schools (the latter teaching some English and advanced courses in Mathematics, Language and History and Geography). A very limited number went up to the Higher English schools which were just being started by Government, Missionary and indigenous agencies. The Government-sponsored Dacca College and the Dacca Collegiate School, as also the Jagannath College and school started by princely benefactors were functioning and it was to the Dacca College that my father, Govinda Chandra Banerji went up after his schooling at the Collegiate School, the first in the family to do so, about the year 1880 or thereabouts. A Mr. Pope was then Principal. The call for going out in search of emoluments from Government or semi-Government service was not yet very insistent in our parts and my father was preceded in such adventuring by a few picked men from the Pargana of Vikrampur, some of whom distinguished themselves as Executive and Judicial and Accounts officers and doctors in Government employ. The less fortunate joined as clerks in Governmental establishments in the District or the Divisional headquarters.

The prestige of Sanskrit and Persian scholarship was still high. Brahmin Pundits learned in the *Smritis*, in Astrology, in Vedic and Pauranic rituals, and Maulanas versed in Islamic lore and Vaishnavite *gurus*, disciples of the Chaitanya cult, were widely respected and made an honourable living, setting examples of plain living and high thinking and high morals which are rare in the present days. Sanskrit and Islamic learning had not yet been standardised by Governmental or semi-official Boards and Associations and Sanskrit *Tols* and Muslim *Madrasahs* were real centres of old-world culture and learning. Nor did the villages lack in healthy diversion and edifying and stimulating entertainment. The organs of mass education still functioned : and *Kathakas* (cultured Brahmins with trained musical

voices versed in the ancient scriptures, Puranas, the Gita and the Bhagavata and *Chaitanya Charitamrita*—the *Bible of the Vaishnava cult*,—who were also apt singers and reciters) kept thousands spell-bound by their recitals given in rich houses from time to time : the *Jatra-wallas*, the *Kabis*, the *Tarja-singers*, the *Bauls\** kept the minds of village folk sweet and clean. Such minds were stirred to piety, a sense of human solidarity and good fellowship by dramatic improvisations from Pauranic lore by performances of set pieces in stages beneath a big *shamiana* ( canopy of canvas ) in the open or under the shelter of the rich man's *chandi-mandap*. Competitions in poetic improvisation ( by *Kabis* and *Tarja-singers*) were as much an order of the day as boat-racing, lathi-exercise, javelin-throw, sword-play, etc. Then, there were festive ceremonies in every house-hold throughout the twelve months of the year, the Durga Puja (worship of *Sakti* in all its phases), the Saraswati Puja (worship of learning and the fine arts) and the Jagaddhatri (Sustainer of the Universe) and Manasa (Serpent-goddess with a variety of legend and romance about the deity) Pujas being celebrated with comparative pomp and splendour according to the means of the richer families, which gave play to the art-instincts of the village men-folk—to which every man and woman and child in the village and its environs were bound to be invited and entertained and feasted—pundits receiving presents, servitors their prescribed fees, the officiating priests making their fortunes ( in piles of clothing and rice and sweets and fruits and money presents), the beggars and the mendicants receiving their doles. Even the poorest householder observed certain rituals of daily worship and the blowing of conch-shells and the plucking of fruits and flowers in a spirit of religious humility, the morning and evening prayers and *Bhajan*-singings, pilgrimages to distant villages which sheltered shrines of saints or were the sites of religious temples of repute—all these helped to maintain men's spiritual longings on a level of sweet decency rare in these days of hustle and grab and greed, of the western cinema and the tainted stage which often make of sex an obsession and direct green minds to the by-ways of immoral conduct by open or subtle suggestion, which trail the sweetness and purity of the normal sex-life and the decent

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\* Different categories of roving devotional musical parties and individual songsters in local dialects.

community-life to the dust and make of life one abnormal medley of sensationalism and sex-hunger and kill the decencies of social behaviour.

It was in such an atmosphere of simplicity and robust good-fellowship, of wide charity and tolerance, of a co-operative community-life that I was born and nurtured. My recollections of childhood are faint but I was a rather sick child who was often in the throes of physical agony, the despair of the family. It was the angelic ministration and vigilant care of my maternal grand-mother with whom I lived for the first 4 or 5 years of my birth, that kept me alive. I remember the *hatey-khari* (initiation into learning) ceremony of childhood, when with a new cloth tucked on to my waist and a new scarf attached to my chest, a sandal-paste imprint on my forehead, I had the sweet sensation of this my initiation into the portals of learning by a far-famed Sanskritic scholar who made me sit, serious and silent, on an *ashana* (a small carpet) and after the usual prayers, held my tiny fingers of the right hand and made them write some of the alphabet of my mother-tongue with a piece of chalk on a plate of ebony-black sandstone. And then, as a big feast was out of the question, being beyond the slender resources of my sweet and pious grand-mother, I was given sweetened balls of fried rice to present to groups of men and women and children who attended the ceremony of initiation of the *Burra-Karta's* grandson as a matter of duty and a mark of reverence for the wide-hearted head of the family, although he had spent away all his fortune in charities and presents leaving his widow virtually penniless—with a big mansion and its appendages and religious practices to maintain out of very slender funds and inadequate landed properties ! Another remembrance of my days of infancy also shoots up—how I was sometimes taken to the houses of the milk-producers of the village, tenants of my grand-father, and how I was always cheerfully treated to milk, curds and fresh butter by these grateful servitors of the family ! Also my first essays in learning, by writing on banana-leaves with reed-pens with sooty-ink, under the direction of the village school master in the outer court-yard of the house—and how I could not produce the required curves and scrawls and was the despair of the school, being dubbed a slow-witted child with no promise at all ! And how my grand-mother, the grand old lady steeped in old-world pieties,

never despaired of her grandchild, and had always a kiss and a sweet embrace ready for the dullard ! These are precious memories sweeter far than those of school and college laurels which came to the soft-headed, slow-witted child quickly after !

Another recollection comes up to the surface—of joining a party of elders and coevals in attending a feast given to Brahmins by a non-Brahmin family in a rather distant village, where I was carried in the arms of some relation, and from which I returned with copious presents in the shape of a two-anna bit and a bell-metal tumbler of very small dimensions, appropriate to a child-Brahmin ; and how I cherished them !

The next phase is when I was transferred to my father's home at 5 years of age, in 1890, a good eight miles' distance from my maternal grand-father's. After some months with my paternal grand-mother, another grand old dame of the old stamp, my mother and I were transported to the far-off sub-divisional centre of Gaibandha (then a small hamlet of straw-houses with only the Courts, the High School, the Jail and the Sub-divisional Officer's quarters housed in *pucca* buildings, with a straggling population of probably one thousand. It had a market where stationery, clothing, leather-goods and other commodities of daily use, utensils and hurricane lanterns, umbrellas and such like things were sold by standing shops, and there was a buying and selling of milk and fish and vegetables, country-grown fruits, *gur*, etc., every afternoon with a bigger assortment of goods for sale on *hat* days twice a week. Gaibandha is in the district of Rangpur in North Bengal, where my father was serving as an inspector of Primary and Middle schools under the District Board with ultimate control by the Provincial Government.

The first wonder that enraptured and enthralled me in this journey was the steamer run by the I.G.S.N. from a riverine station (8 or 10 miles from my village) on the Padma to Goalundo and thence again to various halting stations in North Bengal. There were no railways yet connecting the North Bengal districts and sub-divisional centres with Calcutta and the steamship line carried passengers first to Goalundo and from Goalundo up the Brahmaputra river to North Bengal stations. The steam-vessel with its big smoke-emitting funnels, its wood and steel structure, its big size appeared to my child-fancy as something superlatively grandiose—a mystery and a wonder !

And then when the steamer was boarded and its engines came in sight, what trepidations of heart, what fearful sensations of ecstasy ! This was the child's first acquaintance with the outer world of movement and speed : and the motley, colourful crowds packed up in the steamer's decks and holds—middle class gentry with their veiled ladies, peasants with their untutored families, urchins and striplings, with all kinds and conditions of packings and trunks and utensils and drinking-vessels and bath-room pots and variety of food—mostly *chira*, *muri*, *murki*, *gur* and bananas—coupled with the strange-clad appearance and sonorous but sad cries of the steamer crew—'Ek bam miley na'—'not yet one fathom'—sounding the depths of the river-bed—the halts at the intermediate stations, where the passengers had sometimes to be brought to the steamer's side on big country-boats manned by a crew of 8 to 12, the confusion and the hurry and the hustling and the jostling—all together produced on my child-mind an eerie impression of novelty and strangeness which flashes up even after fifty-five long years ! Three days of such journey during which we were mostly fed on fried rice preparations and sweets and fruits, with occasional rice, *dal* and fish preparations during long halts in some big steamer station carried us to a landing station, 12 miles from our destination. These 12 miles had to be negotiated on primitive bullock-carts without springs and with screechy wheels on rough and uneven *kutchha* roads and we, who were new to such means of transport, were sick and uneasy *en route*. It was a bone-racking and heart-breaking experience of primitive travelling !

#### SCHOOL-DAYS

Thus at five years of age, I was transplanted from my native village to a new domicile amidst a new people and in a novel atmosphere. But though a centre of the official administration, the small colony (it could hardly deserve the name of town or city) was only a big village with certain British institutions hanging around it and controlling its affairs, *viz.*, the courts and their appendage, the jail, the High English School and a few officials, the Executive Officer in charge of the sub-division and his staff, two judicial officers and their establishment, the Police contingent with a good old gentleman risen from a mere police constable to the rank of an Inspector helped by

2 or 3 assistants as the Head, the Post and Telegraph men, the District Board school-inspector (my father) and the Board roads and buildings overseer, the Government Assistant Surgeon, a Calcutta Medical College man, and his hospital staff, plus a small group of Law graduates and lesser fry called Muktears, who could not practise in the civil courts, with their clerks, a few independent medical men, allopaths and *kavirajas*, and just a few road and building contractors and businessmen, the High School teachers, with a sprinkling of the third and second order of landed aristocracy—small zemindars or big *jotedars* (landlords intermediary between Government and big zemindar) with often a thousand acres of land under their control—with their managers and rent-collectors. The latter-day division between officials and non-officials hardly existed and it was a compact society where from the highest dignitary, the Sub-divisional Magistrate, to the office peon reciprocal relations were of the nicest, and outside office hours nobody felt the stigma of inferiority. Our house—an assembly of just a few unpretentious straw huts with two kitchen-sheds (one exclusively reserved for my widowed grand-mother) and an outer cottage for friends and guests, plus a small shed for housing my father's country-bred pony—was just a few paces from a small stream which flowed in endless zig-zags and twists and bends into the bigger Teesta river. The close neighbours were families, the heads of which were either lawyers, or subordinate court-clerks or doctors or landed gentry,—these last belonging to the District proper, whereas the former like ourselves were mostly importations from the better English-educated and more enterprising and more over crowded districts in East, West and North Bengal. Life flowed at an even, leisurely pace and people content with their earnings were hospitable, courteous and fond of social intercourse. The women-folk had not the freedom of these latter days of feminist resurgence but they visited among themselves either walking by by-lanes or being carried in bullock-carts or *palanquins*, the transport *par excellence* in all areas of North Bengal. There were social meets on festive occasions, and besides, there were opportunities for friendly chats and innocent diversions during the hours of afternoon when the men-folk were away pursuing their avocations. Living was very cheap and my father with his income not reaching even a hundred rupees per mensem was in fairly easy circumstances, entertaining friends, receiv-

ing guests, subscribing to Puja funds opened by the local gentry or to theatrical or *jatra* performances.

I was admitted to the lowest class of the local High English School when I was about five and a half years old and received a double promotion, which was for some time a great strain. In those days it was the practice to send up boys of class five (the Matric—then called Entrance—class was class one) for the Middle Vernacular Examination, which had a course in Bengali, Mathematics, Geography and History almost as stiff as the modern Calcutta Matriculation course. Imagine the plight of a child of 7 to 9 years of age, whose reasoning faculties were hardly developed, made to grind at lessons in Euclid's Geometry and the Unitary Method and Rule of Three with various complex arithmetical sums of field measurement, of clocks, of lotuses and lilies in and out of water, of interest and discount. In my case the result was a nightmare: the Bengali and the English course I followed with zest, but sums of ingenuity and geometry lessons, Propositions 5 and 26 of Euclid sat on me like a nightmare. And though I had learnt to scrawl my alphabets in a week and could read through difficult Bengali primers in six months, the three years of my school (class eight to six specially) were like a bad dream. My father, when he was not touring in the mofussil areas, inspecting his schools and putting them in pace and enforcing the regulations (he was a strict disciplinarian who did not spare himself or others when a job had to be done), made prodigious efforts to inject Euclidian Geometry of angles and triangles and all their subtle deductions into my callow intellect. The result was tragic ! I have not forgotten the horrors of these lessons yet and I was never very proficient in mathematics, for the simple reason that my early experience produced a dazed state of mind and infinite distaste whenever mathematical lessons had to be learnt and digested in my college days. But when I reached class V (I had just reached my tenth year), my faculties sprouted forth and I could equal the best bigger boys even in mathematics—those whom I had always left much behind in language and history subjects. Map-drawing was also one of my pet aversions: this was also a mechanical art and the texture of my intellect good at pure ideas of literature, philosophy or politics has been such as to fight shy of mechanical, rule-of-thumb subjects.

In later days also when I was at the First Arts (now called Intermediate) course—it used to be a very hard and packed course in 1900 when I came to College—advanced English Prose and Poetry, Composition and Essay-writting, advanced Sanskrit, Histories of Greece and Rome, Deductive Logic, Physics (from General Properties, through Heat and Light to Electricity and Magnetism with descriptive analysis of pumps and levers and electrical and magnetic devices and other things), Inorganic Chemistry, Mathematics—Higher Algebra, Trigonometry and advanced Geometry, Conic sections, etc.—I was an easy first with the Arts subjects, but could not scrape more than 60 p.c. in the Sciences and Mathematics. I mention these facts only to demonstrate that there are in every learner certain ‘universes of discourse’ where his mind has free play and others to which his mind is more or less closed—and subjects and topics beyond his natural instincts and interests, however rammed and crammed into his brain—are never remembered or retained or found capable of being turned to any profitable use in after-life. Thus I am not ashamed to confess that I managed to forget all my knowledge of trigonometry and surds and asymptotes and binomial and exponential theorems and all my knowledge of Physics and Chemistry—all—even before I got my M.A. in English Language and Literature with credit, only three and half years after I passed my First Arts examination. And today, I can follow the lessons in these subjects when expounded by the teacher in a class-room and can probably ask questions and guess if the answers are right or wrong (for certain brain-impressions persist by natural law) but generally my mind is an utter blank with regard to science and mathematical subjects. The details have clean evaporated, leaving only some faint remembrance of the general theories and outlines.

The conclusion to my mind is irresistible that a boy’s natural predilections and interests must be measured and known by the teacher before he is launched on any subject. I have known also the reverse side of my own picture—a College student, very proficient in Science and Mathematics, making frantic efforts and yet failing to make any headway with Milton’s Paradise Lost or English Lyrics or Addison’s prose essays or Bacon or Shakespeare’s dramas : his grounding in the language and its texture has been hopelessly bad at school and yet such is the antiquated and stupidly mechanical

system in our University curriculum that water and oil must be made to mix somehow, so that in the written tests a boy's hopeless ignorance or constitutional incapacity to learn certain subjects in which he feels no interest, is never condoned in the face of brilliant exposition of certain other subjects where he is quite at home by natural causes.

The first and last word in *pedagogics* in my opinion, is the discovery of natural and instinctive interests and an ordered and intelligent effort on the part of the teacher to draw these out of the learner's subconscious mind and to perfect them. This is educating : the rest is senseless and mechanical training, a mere patch-work and white-washing make-believe which fritters away at the very first shock.

But to go back to the days of my early schooling. In our days, there were some *real* teachers fond of their avocation everywhere and I had the luck to be educated not only by home-influences but by the loving care of a few really competent and loving teachers. Some of them were strict and methodical : one or two were free-lance experimenters. When I look back over half-a-century, I feel I am indebted to both these types of teachers. The Headmaster of my school, the late Girija Kanta Bagchi who later on became a Government school Headmaster, was of the first brand, also the Sanskrit and Mathematics teachers. They licked my erratic impulses to shape and encouraged my talent and provided deterrents to my impulsive nature. But my love of Literature I owe to one of my school-day teachers—who is alive even today (he must be ninety now, an invalid and a cripple, yet with a clear mind and normal curiosities and interests)—Sri Banwari Lal Goswami, who rose into repute six decades ago as a poet, a sonnet-writer, a satirist in verse, when Sures Chandra Samajpati, the Benerjis—Indranath and Panchcowrie, and Devi Prosanna Roy Choudhury set the pace of Bengali letters through the then famous literary magazines—‘*Sahitya*’, ‘*Navya-Bharat*’ and ‘*Janma-Bhumi*’.\* He had passed no University

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\* I have tried, in a small way, to repay my unpayable debts to my school-teacher Banwari Lal, in later life, by editing and publishing some of his poetical works—but, alas ! the old tastes are gone and the style and mannerisms of poets of 50 years ago hardly find responsive echoes in ultramodern cynical hearts, poisoned by the eccentricities and eccentricities of modern ‘verse libre’, and prose-poetry, and realistic verse aping the Russian and British-American styles now in vogue, most

examinations but he came of a very learned stock of Nuddea-Santipur, of a Vaishnava Brahmin family of cultured Sanskritic Pundits : he had hob-nobbed with many a celebrity in the field of Bengali letters in his young days and counted amongst his early friends such men of the then very efficient I. C .S—as J. N. Gupta and Sir Atul Chatterji. He had picked up a vast amount of may-be not fully assimilated learning and had a nose for the fine, even the bizarre, in Literature.

Even at rural Gaibandha of 50 years ago, there was a small but fine assembly of Bengali and English books in the home-library of one of my father's friends, who was also a very intimate friend of this teacher of mine—Sj. Sarat Chatterji, a lawyer and elder brother of Sir Atul, who after some years' practice at Gaibandha was transported to the Government pleadership in the District headquarters at Rangpur and practically controlled the entire District by virtue of his efficiency, tact and influence over the District officials and was Head of the District Board and the Town Municipality for scores of years—an unbeaten record in Bengal ! It was this small library that was opened to me as a young boy of ten—and here I was encouraged to 'browse at leisure' on the broad and green pastures of Literature—sucking in, albeit by stealth, Bankim Chandra's *Ananda-Math* and memorising the immortal 'Bande Mataram' song when I was barely ten—reading some of Indranath Banerji's incomparable comic skits, reading some English books, even Paul de Kock (!!), without let or hindrance and without any deleterious effect on my boyish mind : and discussing literary topics, reading '*Sahitya*' and '*Nabya-Bharat*' and '*Jamma-Bhumi*', reading the Bengali translations of Life of Garibaldi and many of Chandi

of which are attempts to manufacture 'inspired' poetry by bringing into the open the crass vulgarities and coarsenesses of the life of the 'great unwashed' on stilts of uneven prose made to play the role of 'unmetred verse' in a jargon which takes some ingenuity and brain-effort to unravel. Modern Bengali poetry has passed through an era of good and bad and indifferent imitators of Rabindric style (which really hardly lends itself to imitation), often nonsensical, sometimes vigorous and pungent, of foreign styles and impressionistic methods, where the centre of the piece is the unlettered, longsuffering, exploited, hungry and poverty-ridden man and woman in the field and the factory. In this cauldron of a new witchcraft, the wizardry and romance and finesse of the old classical masters and their entourage is being cast aside in bumptious ignorance or in sheer bravado !

Charan Banerji's Bengali translations of famous books—*Uncle Tom's Cabin*, *the Trial of Nan Coomar*, etc., Todd's *Rajasthan* and getting a taste of poetry both English and Bengali ! By the time I reached the pre-Entrance class, I could write discourses in English with ease in racy, correct English and I tried my hand at writing even a short essay on the development of Bengali Literature in the mother-tongue ! In all this, the magician and wizard behind the scenes was Acharya Banwari Lal Goswami, who read out to a small coterie of his disciples his new compositions in verse or new poems by contemporary poets. It was here that I had my first acquaintance with Nabin Sen and Hem Chandra and Michael and Bhudev Mukherji and Rames Dutt's novels. Rabindranath Tagore was yet in the offing and him we began to cultivate when we were B. A. students in 1902—a small band of worshippers, to whom Tagore and his poems and essays and novels became an inspiration and who missed no opportunity to hear his discourses delivered from time to time in Calcutta in an angel-voice resonant and lyrical, almost divine. But the foundations were laid here in my youngish school days of a love of literature which has been the solace of my life amidst bewildering vicissitudes of fortune and which really pointed the way to the first love in my life—Education, and principally the teaching and cultivation of languages and literature.

I was a great favourite in the school and in the homes of my little place : my simple boyishness and high reputation at school as a well-conducted and promising scholar coupled with the respect evoked by my parents, contributed to this popularity. My mother, an emblem of unfailing courtesy and sweet gentleness, ever ready to help in festive dinners with never a thought about herself, and my father, a model of the upright educationist, an exemplar of social reciprocity, a terror to erring primary and middle school teachers and their feckless managers, an object of reverence to all and sundry in the entire District, with whom he came into contact, honest and efficient in his duties and yet holding his head high with no leaning towards flattery or extra hob-nobbing with the superior officials—are still remembered with affection and respect in dear, old, Gaibandha, which has now changed beyond recognition. It has a population of twenty-five thousand, a municipality, several Banks, three or four High English Schools, one of them exclusively for girls,

clubs and politics and intrigues, a modern market full of 'modern' contraptions, jute offices, motor cars and buses, veterinary hospitals, noisy citizens and turbulent students—also a glorious band of sacrificing patriots and many constructive centres of social and political service !

The other formative influences in my life have been the *Radha-Krishna Jatra* performances I witnessed as a boy of which the *Adhikaris*, i.e., leading managers, were expert in music and Pauranic and Vaishnavic lore. These were attended by packed audiences and were a hardy annual in the annals of the entertainments of our place. The songs sung were of a really high order and the tender sentiments soaked into our boyish hearts. I am afraid the soft and sentimental streaks in my mental make-up owe not a little to these strains of old-world Radha-Krishna music. But the first play (staged by amateurs on an improvised stage) that I witnessed when barely five years old has stuck in my memory and when at College I read Charles Lamb's delicious essay 'My First Play' in his 'Essays of Elia', I could not but compare notes and found that in the main our impressions agreed. I have forgotten everything about the theme. What could a boy of five understand of theatrical themes ? But the appearance of the Divine Parbati and her consort Siva out of nowhere simply bowled me over and I thought them to be real Divinities and the clap-trap of the stage, scene-shiftings and drop-scenes, the orchestral music, the elocution and the singing, produced in my mind a feeling akin to mystical rapture ! In my advanced age, I have seen so many first-class stage performances, cried over fine acting and mooned over sentimental situations and yet never caught a faint replica even of that fine rapture of my boyish days !

My first school-boy triumph was when, under the tutelage of my revered teacher about whom I have spoken, I prepared and read before a Saraswati Puja Social function presided over by an English District Magistrate a short essay on 'The Benefits of British Rule'. This was possibly in 1897 and the Englishman was highly pleased with my discourse and naturally with my loyalty to the British Raj ! But I was only repeating in my school-boy fashion in fairly correct English the banalities about those topics taught in the text-books and which are still taught in many of our schools, even when British rule appears to be at its last gasp. Another occasion was when

another English District Magistrate came to visit the school and I was in the top class and the first boy of the class. He set us to reading from portions of 'On the Art of Living with Others', included in our University selections but not forming part of our year's curriculum and he paid me in the visitor's book an encomium which must have been a great encouragement to me and my teachers as well. The testimony of a British I. C. S. officer was as good as a lakh-rupee bond in those days ! But better still, I remember my first lessons of discipline of the European brand, imbibed from a scene I witnessed in front of my school as a boy. Two English officials had just arrived there : one was the Magistrate of the District and the other, his superior, the Commissioner of the entire Rajshahi Division. As the latter jumped down from his pony, what was my wonder to see the District Magistrate himself running up and holding the bridle of the pony and never giving it up till he was relieved by the *syce* ! This is a lesson that has been imprinted deep in my memory and this has helped me to understand why with all their faults—want of finesse, lack of constructive imagination, insular habits of racial exclusion etc.—the Britisher still rules the roost in many parts of Asia and Africa. Discipline, loyalty, order are the bed-rocks of the British character and we have to surpass the much-maligned Englishman in these qualities before we can beat him.

School-boy life in Gaibandha now appears to have been one long, pleasant picnic. Fostered by loving parents\* and treated with utmost fondness by almost everyone in the dear, old place—the idol of my teachers, very popular with my chums at school—I had invitations and caressings in plenty. We tried to sow our wild oats and sometimes

\* Yet my father was very strict and could be severely harsh when occasion demanded. I still remember the licking I had as a small boy when I had absented myself from school on a festive day of entertainment in a neighbour's house and been fined one full anna. Father had been away on tour that day, but to our consternation—I include my grand-mother and mother in the category—he just rode back home when I had come back from school to ask for the extra one-anna imposed as an absence fine from mother at noon, and as soon as he was seized of the situation, my father gave me several lashes with his horse-whip ! Of course, my old grand-mother was furious and did not fail to make father abashed with stories of his delinquencies when at school at Dacca—but the lesson lingered and I was one of the most regular boys to attend school thenceforth.

rambled in the jungly growths near my habitations, sometimes went boating and picnicing without notice to our guardians, though I never could row or cook. Sometimes we had our tricks with mango-sellers in the bazar—going about from dealer to dealer, tasting samples, till we were ready to burst—but I was ever a camp-follower, never a leader in these childish bouts !

One other lesson imbibed even as a school-boy was from my father, who was a man of wide views of tolerance even in those early days of social reform, and dined with his Muslim friends without compunction or concealment and taught us to mix with Muslim families on most intimate terms. One of my best boy-friends has been a Muslim—son of a member of the landed aristocracy of those parts : he is now retired from police service and has turned an Ahmadiya (Muslim of one of the reformed schools) and we still cherish the old affection and are most pleased to meet each other when there is opportunity.

I could never be a sportsman : I had not the knack for sports : and sports in those days had really not begun in the *mofussil* tracts in earnest. But football and cricket and tennis were already making headway and a cycle or two were in the streets. But I was a good walker and good rider even as a boy of eleven and beat in riding executive officers of high grade as a College Professor, thanks to this early training. I could never climb a tree, though I was an indifferent swimmer.

Several other experiences come to my mind of my school-days. First, the nerve-racking experience of the severe earthquake of April, 1897, which was very acutely felt all over North Bengal and Assam, laying many structures in ruins, making wide fissures on the surface of the land as big as 15 or 20 or 30 feet wide from which issued sulphureous fumes and lumps of sand, and rushing streams of water which even changed the course of rivers. It was a Saturday, fortunately for us small school-boys and the classes had been dismissed by half-past one. I have still a very distinct recollection of the onset. We were sitting at about 4 p.m. in one of the living rooms (*kutcha*) of our house (which had for some years past been shifted to the other bank of the stream) with my father working at his official files, when all on a sudden there was a great, strange rumbling noise above our heads and it sounded like a host of giants

beating up the roof of straw and bamboo : then there was a big shaking and rolling about of the earth all round when nobody could keep on his legs but either began to reel or had to squat. Father at once gave the alarm : 'it is an earthquake' : and we all rushed out of the shed into the open.

The quake was so sudden and terrible that many elderly people lost their heads while it was on and forgot all about their wives, children and dependants and ran pell-mell to distances, furlongs away from home. As soon as the first quake had subsided, people began to gather their wits a little and to confer as to what should best be done. News arrived that the court-houses, the jail, the High School buildings had all suffered appreciable damage and there had been long and wide cracks everywhere on the land-surface. Meanwhile, there were further shocks and it was noticed that the river had changed its flow from the original direction to its opposite. There were two or three ferry-boats of big size for ferrying men and cattle and goods and bullock-carts and other conveyances across the river (the main town was on the bank opposite to our new house) and these were fastened together and women-folk and children were boarded on these, with the men-folk keeping watch all the night. This continued for 2 or 3 days.

Then in a few days' time news of extensive damage and loss of life began to pour in (in those days there was hardly any Press, except Surendranath's *Bengalee*, in English, and *Hitavadi*, *Bangabasi* and one or two other Bengali papers published in Calcutta ; there was no news-service, no radio and naturally news took time to filter through)—and harrowing tales were told of extensive damage in the District Headquarters at Rangpur and elsewhere and in Assam and loss of valuable lives and also of dramatic escapes ! The shocks continued for about six months at intervals and by August or September the changed river-flow inundated our house and even cooking had to be done on raised platforms with great difficulty. At this crisis, father hired a big boat which we all boarded and after two days reached a steamer station on the Brahmaputra, wherefrom we went home to our native village via Goalundo. There also things were more or less in comparative disorder but the quake-damage was not so pronounced.

Another incident of my school-life was rather funny, though it

caused considerable excitement in our more or less sleepy hollow, where life used to run at an even, uneventful pace, with hardly any break, except for official visits by the District or Divisional Heads or the Inspectorate of schools or for *jatra* performances requisitioned from Calcutta or other big towns during Durga Puja and Holi. This was a two-handed fight between the President of the School Governing Body who was no other than the Sub-divisional Magistrate and the Secretary, who was one of the judicial officers and a strong man—it was all over the firing of loud-noised crackers and bombs (the process was to fill up iron pipes with gun-powder and then fire them) on the occasion of the Saraswati Puja celebrations of our school. The Magistrate, felt disturbed in his court-work by the racking and loud reports and peremptorily ordered an immediate cessation without consulting the Munsiff-Secretary. The result was a firm 'no' from the other side : on which the Magistrate had the bomb-firers and drum-beaters arrested and put in *hajat*. Relations got very strained ; the Magistrate did not attend the functions and it required the interference of the District Magistrate and the District Judge to smooth out matters after several weeks of very strained feeling.

I recall even today loving and encouraging treatment by the really learned men who then came to us as officials—they were often honorary examiners of our annual tests and as I scored very high in Arts subjects, I was often sent for and petted. Encouragement came also from Senior Inspectors of Schools, superiors of my father, who often were our guests, and who asked me all manner of questions, which often I could readily answer. Mathematical conundrums of greased poles, lilies with their stems in and out of water, clocks keeping time, besides questions on English grammar, translation and history were asked and this was an additional stimulus to my boyish effort at shining in the class exercises.

One other recollection is that of the learned scholar and social reform pioneer, Jogendra Nath Vidyabhusan, who was for sometime the Sub-divisional Magistrate in our place. He had contracted a widow-marriage over seventy years ago with the widowed daughter of the famous Sanskritist Pandit Madan Mohan Tarkalankar (if I remember aright) and used to live in state : he was a finished man of letters and had translated many English books exposing the iniquities

of British diplomacy and rule into racy Bengali. It requires courage of the highest order in a high-placed Government officer and though I do not recollect any personal contacts, his burly and stalwart figure full of determination still flashes before my mind's eye.

Another thing about my early upbringing should not go without record : it was the lesson of family solidarity imprinted by my parents (they sheltered, fed and educated not only nephews but distant relatives) and the lessons of hospitality and intimacy, of social intercourse irrespective of religious or communal labels.

In 1900 nine or ten of us were sent up for the Entrance Examination from our school. We had to go down to Calcutta for the Examination and with my first visit to Calcutta with one of the younger brothers of Sj. Sarat Chatterji begins another chapter of my life.

I was barely 14 years and over, when I left for Calcutta by steamer, first to Goalundo, and thence by railway. In those days (46 years ago) Calcutta had no electricity, no electric trams, hardly any motor cars or buses and no cheap rickshaws. There was the *ticca gharry*, the *palanquin* and the English Company's tram service drawn from stage to stage by relays of big-boned horses. The wide streets, park and boulevards were non-existent : the Harrison Road had been opened, cutting through part of the Burrabazar slum-area stinking with garbage and filth, about 12 or 14 years earlier. Calcutta aristocracy was still functioning : the Sobhabazar Debs, the Pathuriaghata Tagores and Mullicks, the Pataldanga families, the Boses of Baghbazar, to name a few.

The condition of colleges and messes (with the exception of the Government Presidency College, the Duff College and the General Assembly's Institution and the St. Xavier's) was still rather deplorable. The Metropolitan and the Ripon and the City Colleges, specially the first two, were manned in large numbers by East Bengal students, for whom the names of Vidyasagar and Surendranath were great attractions ; but arrangements for teaching and maintenance of discipline were still not up to the mark—though some of the best scholars of the times were on the teaching staff. The messes were never inspected and supervised and there were quarrels and intrigues and worse things were perpetrated. The Hindu and Hare Schools' prestige ran very high throughout the

Province. The Museum, the Zoo and the Kalighat temple were the centres of attraction for people coming from the country areas. The palatial new-type structures of today were not there but the aristocracy had some really nice mansions.

It was to such a Calcutta that I came to sit for my first University examination. I stayed for a fortnight or more and after sitting for the examination and doing the usual sights and offering Puja at the Kalighat shrine, left, so far as I remember, for my native village, after a short stay with my parents at Gaibandha. When the University results were out, I had secured a second-grade scholarship.

## CHAPTER II

### COLLEGE DAYS : DACCA & CALCUTTA

#### POLITICAL APPRENTICESHIP

#### (1900—1905)

I went to my native village and stayed there for some weeks, after I had sat for the Entrance Examination in 1900. Before this, I had visited the village home off and on with my parents during the Durga Puja vacation and once on the occasion of my grand-mother's sradh ceremony in winter. The Puja used to be performed in our house with some pomp during those days ; and the house hummed with guests and relations, and the fun and frolic of young boys and girls dressed in gala dresses, and there was large-scale feasting with simple dishes. The Muslims of the locality, many of them our tenants, came in a spirit of utmost cordiality. There were as many as sixty Puja-performances in the village in those days and mutual invitations and exchanges of offering of *prasadi* fruits and sweets from the *Puja-mandap* between different houses were an obligatory code of social behaviour. For five days the ceremony of worship, accompanied by drum-beatings and *ullulations* from ladies' throats and charming flute-playing and sacrifices of goats continued, ending on the *Vijoya* day, the day of the immersion of the image, when after the ceremony of immersion, the rich and the poor, young and old, masters and

servants, all met in close embrace, the juniors taking the dust of the feet of the seniors as a matter of form and the seniors giving them their blessings of the season. This courtesy was extended to the entire village which transformed itself for that day at least into one solid human fellowship. Old enmities were forgotten and new vows of loving intimacy taken.

In certain rich houses, *jatra* and *kavi* performances were given, providing entertainment to thousands from neighbouring villages. And in certain villages bordering on the big rivers and the lesser streams and canals, hundreds of Durga images were taken out in big boats, to the accompaniment of music and lights and parties of performers, and after exchanges of courtesies and settlement of questions of precedence as regards the order of procession, the images were thrown into the water. On these occasions, there were exhibitions of boat-racing and *lathi*-play and other exercises. The Durga Puja, was, in fact, a national festival drawing even non-Hindus into its orbit in those days and was an occasion for the cementing of friendships in the village community.

I was in the village during the early months of 1900 and I made the acquaintance of many of my village-folk, Muslim and Hindu, and visited the houses of relations and my maternal grand-father's home and got a better idea of our area than I had before. It was the dry season and often I walked distances of 8 or 10 miles on foot : this gave me an opportunity of studying the fauna and flora of our region and of regaling my eyes with the charm of long-stretching fields covering miles. We had very often no regular roads, but we made our way along foot-tracks through the dry fields or margins of land-plots under cultivation.

It was at this time that I visited for the first time the city of Dacca, the second city of the Province, which was our District and Divisional Headquarters. I saw, the colleges, the schools, the law courts, the Nawab of Dacca's *Rung-Mahal* House, the old, historic cannon-piece, the wide play-grounds of Ramna (which are now the location of the University of Dacca and many Government offices and the Government House), the beautiful promenade named the Buckland *bund* on the river *Buri-Ganga* which flows by the city. But what I remember most was a remarkable exhibition of physical feats (stone-lifting and stone-balancing etc.)

by the famous physical culturist of East Bengal Srijut Parshanath and the play with a trained Royal Bengal Tiger by Syamakanta Banerji, who in his later days renounced the world and became a *sanyasin* under the caption of 'So-aham Swami' (i.e., one who has realised the identity between the *Jivatma* and *Paramatma*, between the individual and the Universal soul). Also to my memory comes back the miserable and sleepless night passed in a hotel in a by-lane infested with bugs and flies, and reeking with nauseating smells from an unwashed drain. The city of Dacca, like other old cities dating from Moghul days, was then very insanitary and the Municipality was very inefficient. Besides, the population of Hindus and Muslims had hardly any ideas of sanitation and ordinary hygiene. There were beautiful *Thakur-baris*, mostly Vaishnava temples with big courtyards, erected by the rich *Basack* (weaver) families and mosques : but the drains were open, the bazars were filthy and it was far from delightful to pass along the high and wider thoroughfares, not to speak of congested lanes and by-lanes. The only pleasant spots were the river-side (dotted with green-coloured house-boats, a speciality of Dacca town, and other river-craft) and the fields of Ramna and the play-grounds of the police lines at Farashganj. The rest was a veritable hell. There were compensations : living was cheap : fish, vegetables, milk and milk-products, sweets were cheap and plentiful, relations between Hindus and Muslims were cordial and Dacca had a reputation for the cultivation of the musical arts, vocal and instrumental.

After this short interlude of my experience of Dacca, lasting over only 2 days—began my college life there in June, 1900. I had come all the way from my father's place in North Bengal to Dacca by steamer and railway and it was my first experience of travelling by myself. It was a rather exciting experience. I got down at Dacca railway station, hired a *ticca gharry* and drove straight to the Dacca College. I went up to the College office with mixed feelings of fear and curiosity. I knew nobody and was barely fifteen and not oversophisticated, having lived with my parents at home during my school days, with never any the least idea of life in a students' hostel or mess ! To my extreme relief, the Head Assistant of the College who later turned out to be Superintendent of the College Hostel also, took an immediate liking for me, when I told him my ancestry and

my having secured a Government scholarship, and he drove me to the Hostel.

When I talk of a students' Hostel of 1900, it is not to be confused with the picture a modern College Hostel conjures up—spacious two or three-storied buildings, big common-rooms, clean and large dining-halls, spacious court-yards, electric lighting and sanitary dispositions. No, the Hostel was called the *Malitola Hindu Hostel*, being situated in a by-lane named Malitola, which took from the wide Nawabpur Road, the road which led from the Buckland Bund on the river to the open grounds of Ramna. The lane was hardly a model for cleanliness : the building was an old, two-storied building which had been leased from a landlord. One room served the double purpose of kitchen and dining-room and our drinking water was drawn from a ring-well. Three or four of us were placed in one room, provided with a bedstead for each and a rickety chair and an equally unpretentious table. Mosquitoes abounded and those who lived on the ground-floor had a bad time of it, lacking sufficient light and air, rooms being rather damp also in consequence. The cooking was execrable. The number of boarders was about sixty and the common kitchen concocted dishes which we, fresh from our homes, could hardly relish. I remember some of us clubbed together for arranging weekly dishes of extra fish and milk-products and had these cooked specially by the Hostel cooks. This, however, hardly solved the problem, for we only ate in excess on Sundays after rather a poor quality of food during six days in the week. The result was dyspepsia in many cases.

I was one of the smallest boys of the college first year and of my hostel also. Some of my bigger friends and classmates took pity on me and looked after me. They fixed up my mosquito-nets, took me out on strolls and sight-seenings and helped me with offices of love which I can never repay. Most of my room-mates are now dead and gone, but I never can forget what I owed to them—a fresher at College, unused to city ways, separated from my parents all at once and what was more, thoroughly unpractical in looking after myself and my comforts and necessities ! But here also, thanks to my upbringing, I was very popular and after some months at college, when it was known that in knowledge of English and in the art of writing English I excelled almost everybody else, even the boys trained at

Dacca and the District schools, I came in for even greater consideration.

To turn to the Dacca College. We had a science man Mr. Mondy as our Principal. Mr. Mondy was, I believe, a very average person but in those days every Englishman carried immense prestige and authority. In those days, Physics, Chemistry and Mathematics were compulsory in the First Arts (F. A.—corresponding to present-day, I. A. and I. Sc.). Our college which ranked next only to the Government Presidency College in Calcutta had its laboratories and a library. The science subjects—both Physics and Chemistry were taught by a Chemistry man, with the result that the teaching of Physics and the demonstrations were not very illuminating. We had two very able teachers of Mathematics—the renowned K. P. Bose whose mathematical text-books, then just published, are still widely used all over India, and Raj Kumar Sen, a very able mathematician and a very reputed chess-player. Professor Bose had a very interesting and practical way of teaching and his *bonhomie* and alertness, the expressions of a virile personality, deeply impressed us. But the advanced Honours students in the B. A. stage opined that Professor Sen was a more acute mathematical scholar and could be trusted to solve highly difficult problems in advanced mathematics.

Professor Sen had a history. He entered college at a fairly advanced age : the result was that his English was a bit halting and rather original. Thus he had a trick of finding out the absent-minded elements in the class and some of the confirmed 'do-nothings'. Some of these, when accosted by the Professor from his chair, would try to tuck their heads down, in the vain hope that the Professor's eyes would miss them. But the ruse rarely succeeded : when the boy just ahead would respond to the Professor's call, the latter would detect the trick and cry out in his inimitably sweet voice : 'Not you, not you ! the boy *beneath* you'—meaning 'behind' ! Then sometimes when we were taken over to the black-board and asked to do a sum in trigonometry or a geometrical problem, nice developments were sure to follow. Those of us who knew the ways of the Professor, simply wrote out the sum or problem and patiently and cleverly waited for the Professor to start helping—but some fumbled and could not conceal their crass ignorance or

unpreparedness—and then the Professor would exclaim : ‘If you do *not* understand, and *can not make me* understand that you *do not* understand, how *can I* understand that you *do not* understand’ ? These and similar observations couched in rather an original style were the Professor’s unconscious stock-in-trade and they were the talk of the whole College, albeit in uttermost respect—for Professor Sen was a man of sterling worth and character and had the sweetest of dispositions, being every inch a gentleman of the old school. He was my father’s teacher twenty years ago and my teacher also ; and once when father was retired and I was rather high up in the Educational Service of Government, we had occasion to meet the octogenarian Professor on board the steamer in the course of a journey and how pleased he was to see two generations of pupils—embodied in the father and the son ! He hailed from Vikrampur and was a typical embodiment of the old-world qualities and courtesies of our region.

Our Professors of English were Krishna Chandra Bhattacharyya, a very reputed scholar who rose to be King George V Professor of Philosophy at the Post-Graduate Department of the University of Calcutta, after retiring from the Principalship of the Hooghly Government College, and whose philosophical acumen and learning, specially of the Vedantic and Hegelian metaphysics and Higher Logic were the envy and despair of the philosophical fraternity. In fact, if his exposition had not been so condensed and concise (he could pack up in 75 pages materials which in other hands would take up ten times as much space ! ) and had been a little bit more racy and light-winged, he would have made as big a reputation as Sir Sarvapalli Radhakrishnan. He used to teach us English and Logic with profundity and seriousness. The other Professors were Satyendra Nath Bhadra, Aswini Kumar Mukherji, Gopal Chandra Ganguly and Jyotish Chandra Banerji. Later on, we read with Professor Hallward (a very accomplished scholar, editor of Lamb’s ‘Essays of Elia’ and other classics), Professor Harinath De (who was Librarian, Imperial Library later on and had a penchant for learning dozens of languages with magical swiftness and taking the M.A. degree in the First Class in many of them—Greek, Latin, Sanskrit, French, German, Persian, Arabic, Pali etc.) and Professor Monomohan Ghose—all the last three being, so far as I remember, Oxford men.

Monomohan Ghose was the elder brother of Sri Aurobindo : both the brothers had been sent away to England as small boys by their father and none of them knew any Bengali when they came back to the country of their birth : Monomohan had already published a book of English poems of outstanding quality while in England and his later poems have recently been published by his cultured daughter, herself a College teacher, Latika. Professor Bhadra was a very good conversationalist and had a command of colloquial and lucid English which I have never seen surpassed : he was very social, bossed our dramatic shows and socials (these were not very frequent then) and taught us pieces like Goldsmith's 'Traveller' and 'The Deserted Village' or lyrics where he was quite splendid. People said he was not so good at tackling serious and philosophical authors like Burke, Carlyle, Emerson. Professor Mukherji had a prodigious memory and could quote poetry and prose passages at his sweet will : he was a learned scholar, whose passion was reading, but he was a bit 'showy' and his English was a bit ornamental and crabbed. Professor Banerji was a good scholar, but a bit ultra-critical, had a twang of cynicism and a little bit of bluster possibly—I am not so sure, I was a mere boy then—but he was very fond of us and encouraged me not a little when I stood first in English in a special Prize Examination (called 'Pretoria Prize' in commemoration of the capture of Pretoria from the Boers in South Africa which had just materialised). He said he was impressed by my command of English and my knack of condensing and collecting so much of critical exposition or information culled from various sources.

We had to read amongst other texts Milton's 'Paradise Lost'. Bks. I and II, Black's 'Life of Goldsmith' (English Men of Letters series), Tennyson's 'Aylmer's Field'—rather difficult books—and in our days cheap cram-books, ready-made question-and-answer books had not yet made their appearance and we had to rely more or less on our own Professors and old teachers. The F. A. examination was difficult—only 18 out of 100 passed in our year (1902) : many failed in English, many others in Science and Mathematics, some in the minor subjects—Sanskrit, Logic and History etc. Professor Harinath De took 'Paradise Lost' with us for a few weeks and then went away to the Presidency College : he was followed by Professor Hallward,

whose reading of Milton was exquisite, beautifully rendering the high seriousness and the big-toned resonances of the Miltonic style! He was a quick teacher and the weaker boys could not follow him. Professor Monomohan Ghosh had just come out like Harinath De—and was a very shy person. Poets are always like that : he remained unobtrusive and shy to the end of his days—one of the finest scholars, learned in the classics, and his later-day lectures in M.A. classes (I have heard it from very able students) specially on Walter Pater, Shelley, Browning, Landor—were full of advanced knowledge and ripe scholarship.

Social and extra-academic activities in the College were very limited. During our first year at College, the senior students staged a comic play 'Cox and Box' and I was given a small comic English piece to recite. 'Cox and Box' was pronounced a great success by the mixed European and Indian invitees : Professor Bhadra was the 'boss' of the show.\*

Besides occasional social entertainments (there was no students' common room or regularly organised independent students' unions in those days), the other College events were cricket matches played either on the Ramna maidan or the Farasganj police-lines. I still remember some of the college cricketers—Hemen Ray, Sukumar Sen, Suryya Guha. Ray accepted service in the Accounts Department of Government and rose to be, if I am not mistaken, Accountant-General in Burma ; Sen became a Superintendent of Police ; and Guha after a career in Police and Executive service, resigned, passed the law examination and became a Calcutta High Court Advocate. They played with good form and were men of real worth and some of them later on did commendable social service and political work amongst the people. The other excitements were the University Examinations.

The cause of women's education was still in its beginings in 1900

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\*He is still a prominent figure in Dacca University (which has developed out of the old Dacca College) and widely respected in academic circles. I was present as an old boy at the Dacca University 'Annual Reunion' a few years ago, when my old pupil Dr. Rames Chandra Majumdar was Vice-Chancellor, and met my old Professor. A very interesting discourse written by him on the development of the Dacca College from its earliest days to the University of Dacca was read out by one of the Senior Lecturers of English at the University and was widely appreciated for its matter and style.

and, so far as I remember, there was only one High School for girls in Dacca town and the entire Division. To this went mostly girls of the Brahmo Samaj and the Christian community.

Political consciousness amongst students was still almost in embryo then and I do not remember having read newspapers regularly before I came to Calcutta for B.A. studies in 1902. The Principal and Professors had a more or less easy time. Of course, students' rags and racketting were occasionally staged and caused some flutter ; but that was all.

We had other agencies of education beyond the college : these were the divine services and lectures and written discourses arranged by the East Bengal Brahmo Samaj which was in *Patuatoli*, very near the college : also the Baptist (or Oxford ?) Mission agency where reverend members of the Christian Brotherhood taught the Bible and gave pioneering examples of social service work in a limited sphere. The Dacca Brahmo Samaj offered us two special centres of interest. First, the learned discourses in faultless and elegant English by Principal Heramba Chandra Maitra (who was then Head of the only non-official college at Dacca, the Jagannath College), which we listened to, spell-bound and with reverence, for Principal Maitra's high seriousness and intellectual virility were the talk of the city. If he lacked in anything, it was a saving sense of humour : he was a fighting zealot of the Reformist Brahmo Samaj, a great apostle of Emersonian Ethics and a finished scholar of Burke and Carlyle and he was a great power for good amongst young people at Dacca. He was a little puritanic and un-bending (he possibly did not have the art of 'relaxing') in his enthusiasms and interests, but there was never any question of his sincerity and courage of conviction. He never accepted a Government job and embraced comparative poverty and was a 'nationalist' till the end of his career as Principal of the City College, a Fellow of the Calcutta University, a Professor at the English Post-Graduate section of the University. He is now no more ; but his sixty years of work as educator and administrator of Bengal students and as social reformer and one of the first band of zealots in the Swadeshi movement of 1905 and after, have left their ineffaceable impress on the soul of Bengal. The other draw at the Brahmo Samaj was the devotional songs sung by Sj. Chandranath Roy. He charmed everybody's soul

by his elevating music, and even those who came to scoff remained to pray with the Brahmo Congregation and went away edified.

There were other attractions, which also had their indirect educative effect. There was, first, the annual *Janmastami* festival celebration in honour of the birth of Lord Sri Krishna. On these occasions the colleges, the schools and the courts had local holidays. There were two competing parties in the religious carnival and they vied with each other in bringing out processions with horses and elephants and big chariot-like structures on bamboo and wood platforms drawn by bullocks or relays of men, which featured in clay images and pictures with explanatory captions, scenes from the Ramayana and the Mahabharata and the Puranas and also gave satiric and pungent demonstrations and commentaries on social evils and current sensations and topics. Thousands of people came from different parts of East Bengal districts to witness these shows—staged on two different days by the two rival parties and the excitement was immense. We, who were still boys then, tasted high adventure and romance in these exhibits and they still linger in our memory. In later days, this beautiful and educative show has often been marred by communal and group squabbles, leading to broken heads and worse ! Alas, for modern days !

Then there were also the Vaishnavite ceremonies in the various Hindu temples of the city—the *Dol* and the *Rasha-Jatra* and *Jhulan Purnima* celebrations ; in some of these attracted large crowds. The student-community shared in these and we went out in groups on evenings to the various quarters of the city to see the paper-decorations and the floral designs with which the sacred images and the precincts of the temples were decorated on those occasions. There used to be *Kirtan* songs and demonstrations of instrumental music (specially *Sitar*) and we listened to them with gladness.

My two years' life at Dacca College was punctuated by frequent visits during week-ends and holidays to the village-home. Sometimes, I was accompanied by a college chum or two and we were entertained at each other's houses, our relations welcoming us with good cheer and lavish hospitality.

These journeys from the city to the village (8 hours' distance by fast-moving boats) were made in boats of a special make, with a crew of 7 or 8, which carried passengers to different stations from the

Dacca city to our Vikrampur region at very cheap rates. Only five or six pice had to be paid for the fare from the city station to the landing ghat on the river Dhaleswari, three miles from my village, which had to be covered on foot during dry months and in small country-boats during the rains. The boats we took at Dacca, carried a motley crew, teachers and lawyers, professional men and students and business men and ordinary peasants, court touts and litigants and rascals and vagabonds. The topics discussed were interminable and of original quality—from the price of merchandise, the vagaries of courts, the wonders of the city, cock-and-bull stories of various sorts and descriptions, to comparative estimates by ignoramuses of the relative affluence of Muslim and Hindu zemindars and business magnates—and often led to high words and even free-fights on board. We realised and learnt a lot from these conversations, enjoyed the comedy and the fun but sometimes the crudity and stupidity of the mass-mind exhibited before us hung as a dead weight on our sensibilities. Some of these scally-wags were often muddled by inordinate *ganja*-smoking even inside the boat, which caused some of us great physical unease and had to be interdicted. *Hookah*-smoking was, of course, quite normal and the crew and the ordinary uncultivated passengers passed the *hookah* round as a token of camaraderie. There were no steam-launches or motor-boats for short-distance transport in those days on the East Bengal rivers. Now, however these passenger-carrying-boats are fast passing out of the picture of river traffic in our parts.

Far and away the most momentous event which made a deep impression on me and probably on my sub-conscious mind was the visit of the great Swami Vivekananda to Dacca in March or April of 1901 and his lecture delivered in English in the Jagannath School Hall before a packed audience of, may be, about a thousand people (this was for those times a really big congregation). The Swamiji had before this earned continental reputation and raised Indian culture and philosophy and the Hindu religion (specially the Vedantic *Advaita-vad*) in the world's esteem by his now famous address at the Chicago Parliament of Religions and his subsequent lecture in America and England : he had gone out to the west, a yellow-robed, unknown, unbefriended monk without money and resources, on a spiritual venture, had bearded the lion in his own den and

became, as if by the touch of a magical wand, the cynosure of all eyes at the Parliament of Religions in America, made friends by hundreds, made disciples, and after planting the flag of the Vedanta on American and European soil, returned to the land of his birth and was lionised and feted in South India and Northern India. He had not yet visited East Bengal. His advent was the signal for a big rally of serious-minded enquirers and zealous upholders of the Hindu faith in the city of Dacca. I was a lad barely turned fifteen then and I could hardly follow his lightning address delivered with a strength and a resonance which was almost super-human and I cannot remember a single sentence or recollect a single idea of the address now : I have read printed summaries of his Dacca address in the volumes published by the Ramkrishna Mission (in those days the press-reporting was very perfunctory and I believe no competent press-note was made) and re-read them, and yet can not recall if he really said the things or developed the line of argument as given in these prints—and yet one thing has persisted throughout my life—the impression of a volcanic personality, of an eagle-like poise of body and soul, of something smacking of terrific and tremendous energy of spirit ! Vivekananda must have lighted up with his magnetic, flaming torch of spirit a subconscious nook of the deepest deeps of my budding soul—so that, in later life, his lectures, his sermons, his address, his expositions have moved me as few others could ever move. I was touched by the prairie-fire of a flaming, God-intoxicated and lighted soul which has burnt and seared through the jagged jungle-growths of my untutored mind and beckoned on to a ‘a city of the Eternal Spires’, to be reached by arduous, up-hill love-trysts and adventures in human brotherhood and fellowship of mind with mind, untrammelled by barriers of race, religion and language ! And possibly it was this lighting of a spark in boyhood which made my admiration of Swamiji’s best biographer and most ardent disciple—Sister Nivedita, absolute, when I had the privilege of listening to her angel-tones and looked awe-struck at her spiritual features as an M.A. student at the beginnings of the Swadeshi movement of 1905—an admiration which was all the more deepened by the reading of her books ‘The Web of Indian Life’ and of ‘The Master as I Saw Him’, later on.

Added to this must be put on the credit side of my Dacca life of

only two years, my deeper knowledge of rural life, its good and weak points and my love of the common folk generated by visits to my ancestral home in the village and other rural areas, also the fine lessons in straight and upright conduct and social decency implanted in me by the influence of my uncle (father's elder brother), a gentleman of the old school, unlearned in the English language and untutored in the crooked ways of English transplantation, who often came to the Dacca Hostel to see me and whom I accompanied to market-places and relations' houses when I was at home during vacations ! He died at the age of forty-eight only, but the legacy of love and the largesse of decency he left to me can never be forgotten. Also can not be forgotten the tender love and unselfish ministrations of a College chum, a room-mate and a close village neighbour who read with me and was my best friend and constant companion for four years (during the F. A. stage at Dacca and the B. A. and part of the M. A. courses at the Calcutta Presidency College)—Tarani Kanta Banerji, who was snatched away in the beginnings of youth, when he was just in for the M. A. course, two or three days after his luckless marriage in a far away city of U. P. ! His memory I shall cherish till I join him in the world beyond : such friendships are rare in these days of unscrupulous competition and 'get-rich-quick' ! May his soul rest in peace !

My life at Dacca was over by the end of April 1902. I passed out with a comparatively high place—not as high as some expected (I was really unsure in Science and Mathematics) in the University rolls, and moved to Calcutta to study for the B. A. in the Presidency College.

I was admitted to the Presidency College, Calcutta sometime about June 1902. My first Principal was Mr. Edwards, who taught us Shakespeare with various contortions of the face but was a very able paraphraser and a good man with all his forbidding exterior. He was succeeded later by an eminent Bengali, Dr. Prasanna Kumar Ray (known generally as P. K. Ray) who was a scholar of Philosophy with a European University degree and whose book on Deductive Logic was far and away the best book on the subject in those days. On the science side were Jagadis Chandra Bose and Prafulla Chandra Ray (Sir J. C. Bose and Sir P. C. Ray), in Physics and Chemistry respectively giants of those days, who had already earned

European recognition by their researches, conducted under great odds in the teeth of manipulated obstruction by the European members of the Education Department\* who had the ears of the Lieutenant-Governor and his entourage ! The Geology and the Physiology and Zoology departments were just being organised and Professor S. C. Mahalanobis, another Professor with a European degree, who had the further social distinction of being related to the Maharajah of Cooch Behar by marriage, was in charge of Physiology and Zoology sections. The Geology students had to go to the European bosses of the Government of India's Geology Department at the Indian Museum (Geology section) for instruction, while a Demonstrator-Lecturer gave them the laboratory facilities and demonstrations at the college.

On the Arts side, by and far the most distinguished of Professors was Mr. H. M. Percival, an M. A. of London, a Chittagong-man of Portuguese extraction (there are a few such families there still), one of the ablest Professors of English, History and Political Economy in India, and one who by his independence of character, serious love of study, unflinching devotion to his vocation and intense, though undemonstrative, affection for his pupils (specially the brighter ones) was an outstanding figure in the Presidency College and the educational world till he retired as Principal of the Presidency College in 1918 or 1919 and went over to England to end his days. Those were days of racial exclusiveness and administrative partiality, when the best of Indians trained in Europe and recruited to the Education Service, were always placed below the third-rate crass Englishman or Scotchman even from Edinburgh, or Dundee or Aberdeen, not to mention Cambridge or Oxford and London in the Service Cadre, and these first-rate men got two-thirds the salary of the average European, for no other fault than that of colour. There was also Professor J. N. Das Gupta, an Oxford man with a History degree, a sweet and amiable gentleman of shy and retiring habits, who could never look his pupils in the face ( so shy he was ! ), full of courtesy and sweet reasonableness, who never uttered a harsh word in his life and was incapable of frowning on anybody about anything !

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\*There was one Mr. Jackson of the Physics Department, one of whose main pre-occupations, if rumours were true, was to obstruct Dr. J. C. Bose in his work.

In Philosophy, there was besides Dr. P. K. Ray, Sri Sasi Bhushan Dutt a Brahmo gentleman of very great worth and sterling character, who taught us Ethics and Psychology and had a fine knack of putting the most abstruse points in very simple and condensed English. There was also Mr. Russell, an Oxford man, who gave us good summaries of Sully's book on Psychology but never cared to mix with his pupils on any plane of social intimacy.

In History and Political Economy, the most popular teacher was Professor Benoyendra Nath Sen, a member of the Nava-Vidhan Brahmo Samaj founded by Keshab Chandra Sen—an able teacher, a gentleman of the finest order steeped in social decencies, with an ever-smiling countenance and a silent but none the less deep patriotism.

Mathematics was taught by Mr. Little (an able teacher) and by Sarada Prasanna Das (a very able man and exceedingly nice in social behaviour);—Bepin Behari Gupta had retired when we came in.

Sanskrit was taught by the much-respected Kali Prasanna Bhattacharyya, who later on became a *Mahamahopadhyaya* and Principal of the Sanskrit College : he was a very good and able man and teacher : our only comment on his teaching was that he laid much more stress on dry rules of Sanskrit grammar, very difficult and acid, than on the exposition of literary beauties even of texts like Kalidasa's *Sakuntala* : the other Professor was Bidhu Bhushan Goswami who taught us *Meghaduta* in a very interesting manner and with whom I had already studied at Dacca.

There was a good Library and also good laboratories for advanced science work : but common rooms and seminars, tutorial classes, magazines were not yet existent.

To turn to matters personal. My first residence in Calcutta was a mess in Pataldanga Street (near about Harrsion Road and Amherst Street junction), a two-storied building of which the inmates were all from East Bengal. The members numbered about two dozen ; there were a few gentlemen of advanced years who were in business or in some profession, a few more who had passed their M.A. and were on the look-out for jobs, while attending their law lectures, a few who were sitting for their B.A. from year to year but somehow failed to cross the Rubicon and yet persevered (men of excellent character and disposition, who immediately became our guardians,

but who had passed beyond the years when memorising and preparing for examinations come easy !) and a few school-boys also !

My subjects in the B.A. were English Literature and Philosophy (Pass and Honours) and Sanskrit. In our days one could take up Honours courses in as many as three subjects and I had taken up, in an absent fit of mind, two : *English Literature* (for which I always had a knack) and *Philosophy* (for whose meanderings and excursions and subtleties, I found myself, after a year's study or no-study, rather unsuited). The fact is, Calcutta was such a big proposition after Dacca, the diversions and diversities so many for an unlicked boy like myself, the supervising guardianship so slack—that for the first six months at College, I did hardly any work except attending lectures at college, lazing away at our mess and indulging in rambling and sight-seeing, theatre-going—rather frequently in the after-noons and on evenings.

I made some new friends and contacted a few old chums who had been co-students at Dacca and joined like me, the Presidency College.\* I easily attracted notice soon after joining the Presidency

\* My old friend, Tarani Banerji was there and he was my mess-mate also for some months : also Nripen Bose (now a senior Barrister in the Calcutta High Court, his father had been a leader of the Dacca Bar), Subodh Sarkar (who later on joined the judicial service and is now retired) and Akshoy Dutt-Gupta (a fine Sanskrit scholar, who after many years of college teaching, became Translator to the Bengal Government and is now retired), Sures Dutt Gupta (now Vice-Principal at Carmichael College, Rangpur), Radha Govinda Nath (a fine Mathematical scholar who rose to be Principal of the Comilla Victoria College and is now, in his oldish days, Principal of the newly-started Choumohini College in Noakhali district) and Sita Kanta Ganguli (who later on passed out as Bachelor of Engineering from Sibpur and joined the P. W. D. service and has left us). The new friends were Probodh De (who became a member of the I. C. S. and because of his independence of temper was shunted off as District Judge and is now no more—a very quick and alert student, full of fun, frolic and humour, 'a jolly good fellow'), and Rabindra Narayan Ghose (by far the best Arts student of our set, who resigned his appointment in Government Educational service and rose to be Principal, Ripon College and Lecturer in the Post-Graduate Department, Calcutta University and is now no more—a brilliant man of the nicest character, modest, unassuming, 'a gentleman to the finger tips', who gave 5 years of his early career to teaching in the Arts Department of the Bengal National College—started in 1906, as a sequel to the Swadeshi-cum-boycott movement—on a paltry allowance of only Rs. 75/- p.m. and was widely respected in academic circles to the end of his days—

College on the score of commendatory remarks made on my exercises by Professor Percival and the success that came to me in the annual and test examinations. In our days and even to-day, proficiency in English speaking and writing continues to be the hallmark of academic brilliance and everybody knows that besides qualities of character, what brought Keshab Sen, Monmohan and Lal Mohan Ghosh, W. C. Bonnerji, Surendra Nath Banerjea, Bepin Chandra Pal, Aurobindo Ghose (amongst many others) to the public eye here and in England was their capacity to speak and write expressive and fluent English ! Now, days are changing and the average College students' English is very weak, often lacking in any sense of syntax or style, though on an average his grasp of the mother-tongue is certainly firmer and nicer than in our times. The fact is, the status of the mother-tongue in our British-inspired University continued to be for decades that of a Cinderella, till the advent of the Swadeshi cult and the shape given to it inside the University sanctum by that brilliant man of sturdy and practical patriotism, Sir Asutosh Mookerjee, gave it an honoured place, though not the first and predominant place it ought to have by rights. However, the tide is on and we may expect the mother-tongue to be the first language

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he was an active member of the *Bangiya Sahitya Parisad* and wrote some fine Bengali translations of classical European authors for this Academy—and was also a very discerning English scholar). Jyotis Chandra Ghose, the celebrated patriot and life-long sufferer since 1907 when he was discharged from a Professorship in a Government College for 'political reasons', a man who has trained up hundreds of intrepid young patriots and harnessed them to the cause of India's freedom and between whom and the British Bureaucracy there was never any love lost (he and I were room-mates for a year and a half at the Oxford Mission Hostel when I removed from my Pataldanga Street mess soon after the Puja vacation in the 3rd year) ; Tarasi Kanta Nag (who retired from the judicial service and continued to be one of my best friends till he died recently) ; Brojendra Narayan Chaudhury of Sylhet, who is still one of the elders of the Congress movement there, a fine scholar and a fine man ; Joges Chandra Chaudhuri, Nava Gouranga Basak, Sushil Mukherji (all of these attained distinction as incorruptible and independent Government officials in the Executive side)—and Kiron Kumar Sen Gupta, (deceased) another of my most intimate friends—who attained eminence as a Geologist ; Sailen Sen (S. K. Sen)—also deceased—who attained a position of eminence as Barrister in the Calcutta High Court ; also Asoke Kumar Roy, who took M.A. in English with us as also the B.A., and was till recently Law Member in the Viceroy's Executive Council, were also with us. They made a nice assembly in our youthful days.

and medium of instruction and examination in our Alma Mater in a free India which is now within measurable distance.

Life in Calcutta really began for me in the middle of 1902, when I joined the Oxford Mission Hostel for College students situated then in a rented but airy and neat house in Bhupan Mohan Sarkar's Lane near the Brahmo Samaj. We were about 35 or 36 boarders belonging mostly to the Presidency College, the Duff College and the General Assembly's Institution (now incorporated together in the Scottish Church College), with a sprinkling of students from some other colleges. There was a small contingent of Christian students : we had a common kitchen but separate dining-rooms in deference to orthodox Hindu opinion, which has progressed visibly in these matters of dining and social intercourse in the last 40 years, thanks to the reform movements but mostly as a result of the upsurge in all directions of national life by the Congress movement, specially of the Gandhian era. There was a resident European Missionary Superintendent, one Rev. Shore, working under the directions of the Senior Missionary, Mr. Lamb, a grey-haired gentleman of sunny temper who whenever he passed along the streets, was invariably followed by young street urchins in expectation of gifts of biscuits and lozenges. There were Bible classes in the Mission Hostel but they were not compulsory. The discipline was good and there was real supervision but not of the galling variety. Thus every boarder was expected to be in his room studying during certain hours and nobody was permitted to be in any friend's room after 8 or 9 p.m. in the evening. All lights (lanterns) were to be out by 10 or 11 p.m. (I forget the exact hour) and boarders could not stay out after 8 p.m. without special permission. The Rev. Shore was replaced by the Rev. Jourdain when the former went home on leave.

The proximity to the Brahmo Samaj of our Mission Hostel was a distinct gain for many of us. We went to the Sunday morning services and sometimes the evening services also, joining the prayers, listening with profit to the devotional songs and specially benefiting by some of the sermons delivered by learned and saintly leaders of the Samaj like Pandit Sivanath Sastri, Heramba Chandra Maitra, Nagendranath Chatterji, Sitanath Tattva-Bhusan. We attended the Services of the Nava-Vidhan Samaj also occasionally. What was coming to many of us was a sudden and silent revolution in our

unthinking attitude towards the fundamental problems of the moral and religious life. We were being initiated into western philosophy and Biblical Evangelism and our placid acceptance of the ways and forms of the orthodox Hindu Samaj came in for a rude shaking. Thus the sanctity of image-worship, the subtle explanation given of the apparent contradictions between the *Vedantic* and a *Upanishadic* concept of one Divine Principle permeating the Universe and the individual consciousness and the various gods and goddesses of the later-day Hindu pantheon, the propriety of animal sacrifice in order to propitiate these latter, the reasons behind the caste system and its closed rings, leading to rather worrying discrimination between men and women on the same levels of culture and cleanliness and godliness, the reasonableness or otherwise of rigid rules about dining and entertaining, the question of the seclusion of women and *Purdah*, of the enforced system of widowhood, of neglect of education of women, the glaring inequalities between the sexes, the evils of intoxicating drugs and liquors and of prostitution,—began to be questioned and each of us in his own way and according to the depths and heights of his spiritual and intellectual capacity and home environments had to face these questions for himself.

Coupled with these, bit by bit, swam into our ken political disabilities, the racial exclusiveness and arrogance of the European community in general and other allied problems. Forty-four years ago, though the old, unreasoning and sentimental excesses of the first batch of English-educated youths of an earlier generation and rebellious exhibitions against the time-honoured customs and prejudices of orthodox Hinduism had faded away, the leaven of the new western impact and its subtle propaganda was working and we were touched by the currents of these ideas and also the counter-movement in the orthodox Samaj's barricades of defence against their incursion. The Brahmo Samaj movement was a two-faced movement—one with eyes fixed on Western rationalism or British Churchianity or Unitarianism and another seeking to rationalise and reorient the old ideologies in ethics and religion and social and religious practices by deeper study of the fountains of the old living orthodoxy impeded by the hard pebbles of stratified thought, codified practice and hardened theory of centuries.

The bases of the original Brahmo Samaj founded by that builder

of modern Indian rationalism in religion, society, education and politics—Ram Mohun Roy, were being rudely shaken and altered. There were hardenings of his elastic organisation and schisms had already been formed. The Adi Brahmo Samaj of Maharsi Devendra Nath Tagore and his coterie kept to the old moorings of the Veda and Upanishads, the Sadharan Brahmo Samaj which counted the largest following and was very bitter against rigid orthodoxy and old customs, often to the point of unreason, and which was more radically inclined towards Western ideas and forms largely and consciously borrowed from Christian and Unitarian teaching, was moving too hurriedly towards equalisation of the sexes, an absolute break with the past in matters of moment like marriage forms and customs and questions of food and drink, the usual time-honoured rites observed during the periods of mourning and about purificatory rites of *Sraddha*, caste-rules and *purdah* etc. ; this led to the revolt of a section led by Keshab Chandra Sen, and his New Dispensation under the unacknowledged and yet none the less real influence of Ramkrishna Paramahansa Dev under whose spell Keshab had come and under various other influences, tried to harmonise the ancient Hindu, Christian, Vaishnava and mystical cults. In opposition to these West-inspired revolutionary movements, arose movements of rationalisation inside the body of the Sanatan Samaj whose adherents were counted by millions and who pinned their faith absolutely in the Vedas and their offshoots, believed to have been infallible and sacrosanct and eternally true Divine enunciations and, therefore incapable of being subjected to ordinary human reasoning and its fallibilities. In addition, there were various mystical sects, Neo-Vaishnavites, Saktas of the revivalist Tantric Schools, Theosophy and its adherents or admirers. There was a churning of ideas, a rational and intensive study of the ancient philosophies and ‘inspired’ religious books alongside of the cultivation of occidental philosophies and religious theories.

We, of fifty years ago, were born into an age when the yeast had begun to work, the citadels of unreasoning and rigid orthodoxy were already crumbling, when at least in the bigger cities Europe-returned Hindus were not ostracised but received in society albeit with certain reservations, when emancipated women learned in western lore and not strangers to the indigenous culture were busy creating groups of

like-minded women and the Congress movement had also passed through the first stages of leading-strings, of English inspiration, of mere prayers and petitionings and had created the atmosphere for a real freedom movement based on self-help and self-trust and gradually veering towards Indian methods and forms that might appeal to the already conscious intelligentsia, the backbone of which were the middle-class products of the English education, and the brains were a few leaders who had, almost without exception, learnt their lessons in politics and propaganda first-hand on the European soil. Of course, the mid-Victorian ideas still predominated, but in two or three years' time, thanks to the first reverses suffered in the Boer war by the British, and the phenomenal victories of pigmy Japan over giant Russia, the stage was set for a new political upsurge and method. The agitation against the Partition of Bengal, conceived and carried out by Lord Curzon, with the obvious objective of creating a predominantly Muslim bloc of favoured parasites of the British in Eastern and Northern Bengal to offset the growing, organised, and aggressive political consciousness and activity of the more advanced and more intelligent and imaginative Hindu bloc throughout Bengal—in which we as post-graduate student-leaders joined, came soon after, in 1905. And I, for one, had my first lessons in political agitation then. The year 1905 is a memorable year in the life-story of myself and my contemporaries. Many of us were caught up in the eddies of the nation-wide revolution ; some resiled, some kept aloof but all the finer spirits amongst my contemporaneous youth had their souls touched to fine issues then, and this year of apprenticeship influenced and shaped their future lives and predilections and interests as nothing else had done.

I was talking about the Calcutta Brahmo Samaj. It had a large influence in shaping our concepts of private and social morality, of decencies of social behaviour, our attitude of respect for and chivalry towards the fair sex : it brought us in touch with some of the finest sacrificing reformers and preachers of the age : it created in us a taste for serious devotional music and it was instrumental in gradually shattering our boyhood likes and dislikes—specially in the matters of caste and inter-dining, and it put us on the road towards temperance and truth and honesty in public and private life.

Meanwhile, other influences gradually crept into the orbit of our

otherwise uneventful lives and the most arresting and enduring of these was the personality of Rabindra Nath Tagore. My first sight of the great man was sometime in the year 1902. The Nava Vidhan Samaj used to run a Sunday school, where a junior cousin of mine was a pupil. This school was celebrating its annual day to which I had an invitation. Sometime after we had taken our seats, there was a suppressed excitement amongst the select audience and Rabindranath, a youngish man of the finest presence and refinement, about forty then but looking younger, walked in. After the usual programme of prayers, songs and recitations had been gone through, Rabindranath was requested to address us. He did so, with apparent shyness and reserve but the address, the gist of which I have clean forgotten, was delivered in tones of such entrancing sweetness, crystal clear and resonant, and was couched in such a refined and poetic style, that I felt I had come into the presence of something ethereal and divine, of somebody who lived in the 'upper air' of rarified mystical realisation and rapture ! The next opportunity came in the shape of a public address by Rabindranath at the Hall of what was then the City College (now the City Collegiate School) off College Square. The theme was religious propaganda (*Dharma-Prachar*) : the messianic force of the address, the daring exposure of sham preachifiers of religion, who made of it a trade, the poet's exposition of the real substance of religion as opposed to the froth and foam of blatant verbosity created a wide impression. I do not know how the official preachers and *pracharakas* of the Brahmo Samaj and other religious societies took the address, but it made a strong appeal to our youthful minds, tuned then to high idealism and aspiration. A third occasion was probably when the poet read out his profoundly interesting and original essay on *Sakuntala*, which as a piece of creative criticism has hardly been surpassed by any critic in any language.

My mental horizons were further expanded by excursions, picnic parties, club discussions, exchange of views on various topics with fellow-students at college or in the Mission Hostel, the discourses on Saraswati Puja days by learned men on the esoteric meaning of the Hindu faith and its ceremonial worships. The first year of the B.A. stage came to an end with the beginning of the Summer Vacation when I went to my parents to Kurigram, another sub-divisional centre

in the Rangpur district, smaller even than the place of my school-days nurture, Gaibandha, where my father had been transferred in the meantime. Here we had a fairly good public library in which there was a collection of the classics of English fiction, drama and poetry and Bengali books of fame—and I took full advantage of it. I remember to have read Lytton's novels and Marie Correlli's, and Scott and Dickens and Thackeray, some Shelley and Byron and Keats (who have always been my favourite poets) and the fascinating novels and stories of Maupassant, Dumas and Victor Hugo. 'Les Miserables' and 'Monte Cristo' kept me awake for nights in succession and, I believe, I read some of the fine writings of Bengali poets, men and women, and a little of Rabindranath—and a few serious books on philosophy and religion. But besides these stimulating studies, I had the benefit of the company of a group of senior students, some of them very brilliant, with whom I kept daily intercourse on afternoons and evenings : the brightest of these was an M.A. student in Philosophy, the best scholar of his year, a great favourite with Dr. P. K. Ray, whose command of the technique and abstruse concepts of Western philosophy (Kant, Hegel, Spinoza, Leibnitz, to mention a few of the greatest founders of systems) was really wonderful. He was Lalit Guha who was lost to the academic world by being absorbed into Government Executive Service and rose to be a District Magistrate.

Excessive preoccupation with studies during the summer holidays after a comparative neglect during the college terms, however, told on my health and brain and I was advised complete rest and cessation from study. The brain-fag continued, however, and I rejoined my college with a broken health in June, 1903.

The first three months of my course in the Fourth year at College were passed miserably because of this brain-fag and persistent headache. Medicines failed to give me any relief. I was so unwell that I lost the thread of the lectures of my Professors and there was a clean wash-out from memory of the first passages or points in the lecture as soon as the Professor turned to elaborate the next points. However, much to the relief of myself and my friends a patent medicine (Dr. Lalar's Phosphodine it was called) cured me by bringing on a slight fever and following it up by a clearing up of the fag in the brain and the headache.

I gave up my Honours in the second subject (Philosophy) and kept to English Honours only. The results in the college test preceding the University examination were hopeful. I topped the list amongst English Honours men (the examiner was Professor Percival himself) and was first in Logic (pass) also. But our studies were interrupted by certain happenings in the Mission Hostel and my University results were below the mark. I failed to secure even a First Class, though three of my fellow-students who could never come up with me in the class exercises secured higher places and a First Class !

I have already mentioned that there was a small contingent of students of the Christian persuasion in the Hostel : they had the private ear of the European Missionary Superintendent and consequent on some trivial altercation with us of the Hindu bloc, these (who, it later on transpired, were set to watch our movements and report them privately to the Superintendent as the Superintendent's agents) made trumpery allegations against some of us and the Superintendent, without even waiting for an explanation from the supposed delinquents, expelled one Hindu boarder or two from the Hostel. On this Jyotish Ghose and myself principally took counsel and prepared a strong letter of protest which was signed by 26 out of 29 Hindu boarders—myself signing first. The letter was of my drafting, though we agreed that we would not give any individual names but take joint responsibility for our protest. On receipt of the protest, the Superintending Missionary gentleman, sent for each one of the signatories separately and said he was expelled 'for the good of the Hostel which was synonymous with his own good' and sent letters to our guardians giving all of us a black character. Now, some of us were the brightest amongst the students of the Colleges where we read and nobody believed in the Superintendent's strictures.

Some of us left for their parents' homes—the College lectures were over, we had been sent up for the Degree Examination and the College had practically no further hold on us—but a few of us managed to rent a small house at Bally, a small suburban place about 8 miles from Calcutta and took up residence there for about two or three months before the University examination was to take place.

These two months or more of life at Bally were not without their

compensations. The small one-storied house which we had rented with the help of a fellow-boarder who belonged to these parts, was in a neighbourhood inhabited by middle-class families : it had to be reached by a by-lane and was a very quiet and sequestered place. We engaged an up-country cook who was a police constable on small pay and eked out his small income by this extra work and the sweeping of the rooms and the washing of dishes were done by a local maid-servant who did her work morning and afternoon and left. The constable-cook also did not live with us. So five or six of us had the house all to ourselves : our studies for University Degree examination could not be pursued assiduously in a place like this meant for holiday-making and 'dolce far niente'. We used to study a little during morning and evening hours, gossiped and chatted at our heart's ease, and went out regularly for a dip and a swim in the Ganges (Hooghly) which was about 7 or 8 minutes' walk from our residence. In those days, college-going youth and men with University degree at suburban places like Bally could be counted on fingers' ends and the temporary colony of half-a-dozen Calcutta college boys in the B. A. stage was something of a sensation amongst our neighbours, most of whom were office-going clerks at Calcutta European firms, with limited education and a smattering of English and arithmetic, on small pittances which possibly were augmented by permitted 'extras'. The ladies round about were mostly without any education and the only diversions in their lives were baths in the river, social meets with other women during marriage and other festive occasions and religious ceremonies, outings to fairs held on religious occasions like *Dole-jatra* or *Ratha-jatra* or *Jhulan*, religious pilgrimages to temples and fakirs and sadhus who might be in the neighbourhood for a time. Their ideas of domestic hygiene and making the home pleasant were of the crudest. The male earners of the families left very early in the day for their offices at Calcutta and returned late in the evening and the time intervening was spent most unprofitably by most women, sleeping, quarrelling or card-playing. The relation between the husband and the wife could not blossom into healthy fruitfulness under such depressing conditions and the result was homes without joy and children without vigour of body or mind. Ignorant motherhood and uninstructed wifehood are curses of the first magnitude and act as

a drag on social progress. Life here in the suburban areas and villages of West Bengal near about Calcutta specially was much more drab and mechanical and static than in Eastern Bengal, where women's education and freedom had made very large strides by 1904, the year we sat for our B. A. examination.

Not only this, conditions of river-bathing and other domestic habits also were not conducive to social health. There was hardly any separate enclosure or arrangements for privacy for women bathers and it was a strange irony to see *purdah* women flinging away all canons of purdah and physical privacy in broad day-light in bathing-ghats open to both sexes. I am not speaking in defence of any fastidious sex-prudery here but in defence of ordinary standards of social decency. These things made such an unpleasant impression on my young mind that I recall them with sorrow even now.

The old cultural and social standards and practices had gone under and nothing new had taken their place. This is how British commercialism has sapped the basis of our old village life and its sanctities throughout India.

However, we discussed these matters amongst ourselves and regretted the moral apathy and the mental indolence of the surrounding areas, places with long and ancient history and within easy reach of the influences of Calcutta. But, alas ! these suburbs are still a problem : they are even after 45 years the same stagnant, sleepy hollows with stinking drains, insufficient light and very unsatisfactory roads and hospital amenities : the progress amongst women is also not very pronounced though now there are better facilities for girls' education and far greater freedom. This is because the citizens are mostly 'daily passengers' who have no leisure after their drudgery in and out of offices in the metropolis, to turn their thoughts to civic duties or anything unconnected with individual domestic comfort and mere money-earning. The civic and the social sense are remarkably absent, though Congress has created a band of earnest workers for stimulating this consciousness. Our life here was occasionally enlivened by visits from Calcutta friends or invitations to the homes of college chums near about. We enjoyed them, for the day-to-day life was so unexciting and sometimes positively distressing owing to reasons I have just specified.

The two or three months dragged on till we had to pack and

leave for Calcutta, for the dates of our University examination had drawn very near. The examination over, we left for our homes.

The next phase in my student-life is covered by the year 1904-5, when after graduating with Honours, I joined my old college, dear old Presidency College, for post-graduate study in English Language and Literature and became an inmate of the Eden Hindu Hostel, the students' mess attached to the College and run under Government control. This Hostel is still in its old location just behind the Presidency College and next to the University buildings. It is a very commodious three-storied house with all manner of comforts and conveniences. Even in 1904, it was the nicest students' Hostel in Calcutta. We were about 250 boarders—including a small contingent from Bihar, a very nice band of modest young men, of whom Dr. Rajendra Prasad who has now by his tremendous sacrifice and untiring services and great sufferings for the country's sake earned the affectionate respect of the whole of India, was one. He was two years my junior and our relations inside the Congress also have been marked by utmost cordiality, reminiscent of days of companionship as students. There was also a small batch of medical college students. The superintendent was a senior Professor of the College assisted by an assistant superintendent and clerks. The boarders fell normally into several classes and groups. First, there were the groups of serious and bright senior students who were in the M.A. classess or after M.A., preparing for research degrees or the M.A. degree in other subjects : they were the natural leaders in matters intellectual. Then came the students from rich or aristocratic houses, who studied not so much for moral or intellectual training as for a 'finishing' in the metropolis and its premier college, so that they might hob-nob with European officials after returning to their home districts or get hold of 'big' jobs under Government by official patronage and the recommendation of the English Principal and the white Professors. Then there were the 'under-graduates' and the 'freshers' and a few, 'special' boys of the Hindu and the Hare Schools, who generally were taken under the wings of their seniors at college. The most turbulent and vexatious, however, were some of the 'do-nothings' or idle sorts who used to procure seats in the second floor—also some of the 'medicos'. These latter kept up a constant racket and kept the superintendent and his helpers on the

tenter-hooks by their escapades and frolics ! Their mornings were occupied in shaving (they were habitually late risers) and taking tea and refreshments and then descending from their heights to the low lands of the ground floor and the court-yards, where there were the baths, and taking unconscionable hours in soaping and lathering and in washing and bathing ! This over, the gongs would sound for morning meals which had to be eaten in common dining-rooms (Bengalees and Biharis had different rooms, Brahmins and Non-Brahmins also being separated)—some of these luxury-boarders ordered their meals to the ‘cubicles’ (one-seated roomlets) and ate by themselves or with intimate chums. The others made a big noise while eating, ordering the Head Cook about, sniffing their noses at almost everything and threatening complaints against the poor, hard-worked menial staff of servants and cooks ! Dinner over, some of them would attend classes and sit through the lectures, of course, without any previous preparation or effort to follow—some kept to their rooms, reading trash or going out for rambles or dozing. Once, they and the ‘medicos’ dressed up a human skeleton (the medical students had to study the parts of the human anatomy) by stringing the anatomical parts together and at dead of night introduced the same into a timid boarder’s room. Result : fainting fit, great consternation and a huge out-cry all through the Hostel, the hoary Superintendent getting out of bed, flurried and confused. This was a rag but rather a risky one ! Similar practical jokes used to be perpetrated upon shy or over-serious specimens amongst boarders : these sometimes crossed permissible limits—that was the trouble.

I was a ground-floor boarder at the start and after a few months shifted to a more convenient room on the first floor. We formed a ‘study-circle’ amongst ourselves—of half-a-dozen friends and the main subject of study and discussion was Rabindranath Tagore and his poetry and criticism. The members were Rabindra Narayan Ghosh, Akshoy Dutt-Gupta, Sures Dutta-Gupta, Bangendu Bhusan Mukherji, myself and one or two others. This was the beginning of our intense love of Bengali literature and our devotion to and admiration of Rabindranath Tagore which persists even today. *Naivedya, Gitali, Gitanjali, Manasi, Sonar Tari* and other arresting pieces published by that time were carefully studied and parallels in English and Sanskrit poetry hunted out, and there was fruitful

discussion leading to a widening of our literary horizons and a deepening of our spiritual sympathies and longings and last but not least, an increase of refinement in our tastes and general outlook.

In 1904 Rabindranath's reputation, though high, was limited to a not very big circle of appreciative students and scholars of repute. Men of the old school hardly understood his novel metrical modes or his subtle and refined ideas culled from the fountains of hoary Indian philosophy and poetry and religion and moulded in original technique of language and verse-patterns. 'Study-Circles' like the one we formed at the Eden Hindu Hostel were the pioneers in later-day achievements on a much grander scale and with much larger memberships. The more we read of Tagore's poetry the more entrapped and enthralled we became till even the charms of English poetry of the romantic school were cast into the shade by this poet-wizard and the fact that he was ours, racy of the Bengal soil, a Bengali one hundred per cent and yet an internationalist, was a matter of the greatest pride to this young admirers. Our patriotism, our cultured intellect, our romantic yearnings, our spiritual longings, all found spreading-room in Tagore's poetry.

Meanwhile, we had formed a *Graduates' Literary Union* inside the Presidency College and a group of M.A. and B.A. students gathered round this. We wrote on literary, philosophic, historical topics by turns. We invited our Professors and learned outsiders also to our meetings and we published some of the best amongst the contributed papers in a magazine we started as an appendage to the Union and called it the Presidency College Magazine. Mr. M. Prothero was about this time the Principal : I believe he encouraged our venture. Two of my own compositions were printed in this magazine, when I had the 'thrill' (which must have been experienced by many) of seeing myself for the first time in print. Amongst other contributors were Rabindra Narayan Ghosh and Sushil Mookerji, both of whom wrote very interestingly. But the most precious result of this venture—so far as I was concerned—was my acquaintance with the revered Satis Chandra Mukherji, who was a brilliant scholar and a contemporary of Sir Asutosh Mookerjee. He remained all his life a bachelor for the sake of training up a

body of young men for the service of Mother India and for that purpose, formed a society and named it the *Dawn Society*. The Dawn Society, as I found after my introduction to the founder-servant, had its own office, its own journal replete with serious articles on economics, literature, history, archaeology and topics on ancient Indian culture, philosophy and religions and on scientific achievement written by first-rate scholars. It had also a group of ardent workers and student-members, who were attracted by the saintly personality of Satis Mukherji and the charm of his dedicated life and became the 'inner group' of his disciples.\* I was not of the *inner circle* but I attended many of the special lectures arranged for the benefit of the advanced scholars and learners by the Dawn Society. Srijut Satis Mukherji presided over one of the meetings of our Graduates' Union when I read a paper. He admired it with the constructive comment that I must concentrate my yearning to serve India (which was the key-note of my discourse) in *one* objective and then only I would achieve something tangible.

Meanwhile, my desultory reading continued along with the witnessing of performances of patriotic and classical plays on the boards of the *Star Theatre* and the *Minerva Theatre*, occasional visits to Dakshineswara Temple (the scene of Ramakrishna Paramahansa's religious devotions and sermons) and the Belur Math (founded by Swami Vivekananda on the river-bank just opposite Dakshineswara) listening to discourses by Rev. Kali Churn Banerji, Satyendra Nath Tagore, Lai Mohan Ghosh, Rames Chandra Dutt, Rabindranath Tagore and Sir Gurudas Banerji—the idols of our student-days, besides Hirentranath Dutt and Mrs. Besant. All these formed part of the unconscious training that I with many others was passing through in my post-graduate years. In the hey-day of the anti-partition and Swadeshi movement, we were carried off our feet by the

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\* Of these the most prominent were Radha Kumud Mukherji (well-known now as a researchist in ancient Indian History and Culture, my friend and fellow-student Rabindra Narayan Ghosh and Benoy Kumar Sarkar (also a scholar of big repute and justly admired for his original ideas and novel methods of expression and presentation—original and eccentric—a man of high talent and courage—who never 'plays to the gallery' and is full of never-failing admiration for the achievement of young Bengal of 1905 and after) !

rousing addresses and lectures of Bepin Chandra Pal and confirmed in our patriotic urge by the editorials of the *Sandhya* started by Brahmabandhab Upadhyaya, a Christian by faith and a saint and a patriot of unequalled integrity and brilliance, a man of the people, full of fire and daring, who infused thousands with the electric throbs of aggressive country-love that were in his soul—and by the vigorous writings of the *Jugantar*. These were the organs of the revolutionary upsurge of the time. The silent sacrifice and cultured addresses and writings of Aurobindo Ghosh and the sweet and alluring personality of Sister Nivedita who was another propagandist of the Swadeshi cult—and the songs of Dwijendra Lal Roy sung in chorus as mile-long processions marched through the streets of Calcutta and the entralling cadences of Rabindranath's patriotic and devotional poetry and song—all combined to flood our souls with 'a divine afflatus' and beckon us on to the paths of high endeavour and sacrifice for the country.

The first spark in the Swadeshi-cum-boycott movement of 1905 was really lighted by Lord Curzon by his undiplomatic and uncharitable remarks in his Convocation Address before us, graduates of 1904, in the Calcutta University Senate Hall in the capacity of Chancellor. This must have been sometime in March 1905—I am not sure about the exact dates—when the University Convocation for the conferment of degrees was summoned. I still remember P. K. Ray, the then Principal of Presidency College attired in his Doctor's red robes, Jagadis Bose and Prafulla Chandra Ray also similarly attired and other educational leaders in picturesque academic dresses forming part of the Chancellor's procession (the Vice-Chancellor was Mr. Pedlar, Director of Public Instruction, formerly Professor of Chemistry in Presidency College)—Father Lafant of St. Xavier's, N. N. Ghosh of the Metropolitan, also Syndics and honoured Judges of the High Court, Rash Behari Ghosh and other celebrities—leading Lord Curzon, Viceroy and Governor-General of India and Chancellor to his exalted seat on the dais. There was a conferring of degrees, the greatest sensation of this part of the ceremony being the exceptional honours in every branch of the medical science attained by a young M. D. (I forget his name : he, alas, died a premature death almost in his thirties, and a very promising career was thus cut short) and an additional flutter when

a small group of ladies received their degrees. There was a hush of expectancy before Lord Curzon stood on his feet to deliver his written address. It was crisp and brilliant and vigorous, but very acid and pungent. His unnecessary references to the weakness of the Bengali temperament and character—specially his uncalled for and insulting characterisation of Bengal's enthusiasms as 'soda-water bottle effervescence'—produced resentment inside the Convocation Hall and a very unpleasant reaction outside in the Press when the address appeared in the newspapers next morning. I still can visualise the cynical curl and twist of Curzon's lips and the mephistophelian 'glint' in his eye as he read out his address in clear, ringing tones.

The natural sequel followed—in the shape of a monster meeting in the Town Hall of Calcutta—where amongst others Rash Behari Ghosh, the leader of the High Court Bar and one of the idols of the intelligentsia and a speaker of very literary and refined English, condemned in stinging terms the affront given to the Nation by the highest dignitary in the land, the King-Emperor's Vicegerent and the Chancellor of the premier University of India.

Shortly after, the plans of partitioning Bengal secretly conceived and elaborated in the Councils of the Viceroy and the British Cabinet were publicised in the country—it was probably in June 1905—when we had rejoined our Calcutta Colleges after the summer recess. By that time our post-graduate lectures extending over one year only had been over and we were in Calcutta only to prepare for the University Examination to be held in December.

The popular reaction to this sinister plan could never have been even distantly imagined by our rulers in Calcutta, Simla and at Whitehall ! The Nation's indignation rose spontaneously to a fever-height and Surendranath Banerjea and his adherents in the Districts —Ananda Chandra Roy of Dacca, Aswini Kumar Dutt of Barisal, Ambica Charan Majumdar of Faridpur, Umes Chandra Gupta of Rangpur, Kishori Mohan Choudhury of Rajshahi, Anath Bandhu Guha of Mymensingh, Jatra Mohan Sen of Chittagong—to name only a few outstanding leaders of opinion—besides Krishna Kumar Mitra of the *Sanjibani*, Principal Heramba Chandra Maitra—and the most virile and forceful of them who propagandised the Swadeshi cult all over India—Bepin Chandra Pal—the 'hero' No. 1 of youth

and the student-community of those days for years—were roused to immediate action. Meetings were held all over Bengal—from Calcutta to the remotest nooks and corners—condemning the Partition scheme. Challenging speeches were delivered and a call was given to the Nation to unite and resist the plan of disrupting Bengal and striking at the core of the Nation's strength—by all legitimate means \* A country-wide boycott of British goods was proclaimed by the leaders. The students and youths carried it further and extended it to all British institutions. It was really the signal for a Revolution though without an army.

We, in the Eden Hindu Hostel, began our *debut* in the political arena, by a burning, with great fanfare, of the effigy of Curzon and by a bon-fire of British-made clothing gathered from the Hostel boarders. Immediately after, a students' rally was addressed privately by Sj. Hirendra Nath Dutt and it was decided to call for a boycott of the Calcutta University and its examinations inspite of murmurings of a few not-over-bright students of the Post-graduate stage. I took up the task of drafting a manifesto in Bengali on these lines which was printed and circularised amongst the student-community. We had already resolved to boycott our coming M. A. examination and Radha Kumud Mukherji also joined (he was a candidate for the Premchand Roychand Scholarship). Meanwhile the agitation had already been launched by students in colleges and schools all over the country. The Government reaction was the famous or infamous Carlyle Circular (a Mr. Carlyle was then Secretary to the Bengal Government) interdicting student-agitation and providing rigorous penal measures of discipline. The result was open defiance of the Circular and the first success of the student-campaign was achieved by Sachindra Prasad Basu, a 4th year student-boycotter, at Rangpur, when in response to his fiery address, the Rangpur Bar rose as one man and declared the opening of the first national school in Bengal at Rangpur after a total boycott of the Government Zilla School had been decided upon. One of the leaders at Rangpur, besides Umes Gupta, was the novelist and story-

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\* This is not a historical thesis but a record of impressions and recollections, so I am not over-careful about dates and figures or about sequence of events in an ordered chronology.

writer, Prabhat Kumar Mukherji, who was then practising as Barrister in the Courts of Rangpur (nice, breezy soul)—another was Rashbehari Mukherji (one of my near relations on my wife's side—I had married after joining my M. A.), another lawyer ; still another was Sj. Chakravarti, life-long sufferer and patriot, father of Sri Sures Chakravarti, the famed writer and disciple of Sri Aurobindo. Call came to us in Calcutta for volunteering as teachers of this school and three of us—Brojasundar Roy, M. A., Hiralal Mukherji (a brilliant Physics man of my year) and myself hurried in response and joined at Rangpur. So, sometime early in November, 1905 we practically joined as national volunteers in the educational work started by the people's leaders in a district town. For me, it was paying some of my debts to the District where I had been 'raised' from a boy of five. Brojasundar Roy hailed from Sylhet, was a high M. A. in History, two or three years our senior ; Hiralal was from the district of Barisal, which took the lead in the Swadeshi movement under its inspiring and selfless leader of wonderful ability in organisation, Aswini Kumar Dutt.

By the time we had joined, the movement was taking shape—for between our bon-fire and effigy-burning demonstrations in the Eden Hindu Hostel (we had also participated in picketing of Manchester cloth shops in the Burrabazar area) and our joining the Rangpur National School—a period of about 4 months, the entire countryside was in rebellion. Sir Bamfylde Fuller, the new Lieutenant Governor of East Bengal was a man of excitable and impulsive temperament and was easily led to see 'red' everywhere—and instances of the burning of British merchandise, throwing of Liverpool salt into rivers, sinking of boats laden with this salt were multiplying. In one instance, Sir Bamfylde went beyond the limits of gubernatorial propriety—he personally ordered the Headmaster of the Madaripur High School in Faridpur district, Srijut Kali Prasanna Das Gupta, a very learned man and widely respected, to flog students of the school for having joined in the demonstration. Naturally he refused and resigned : Madaripur also had a national school. Barisal, I remember, was organised into self-sufficient village units and had a large number of national schools not only in the town but also in far-away villages.

At Rangpur, shortly after we arrived and made the acquaintance

of the leaders who received us with the utmost courtesy, we found the town in a ferment—the District Magistrate in retaliation against the ‘rebellious’ conduct of the leaders of the Bar and other professions enrolled 12 or 14 of them as ‘Special Constables’. The ostensible object was to get their help in keeping the peace but the disguised motive which, however, came to the surface at once was to humiliate them—for the Superintendent of Police asked them to report to the Police Headquarters, receive their batons and uniforms and join in the parade-practice with ordinary constables! He was met with an indignant refusal and the leaders were prosecuted. The case went up to the High Court at Calcutta and ended in total acquittal of the Swadeshi group. I still recollect how we also were taken up into the eddies of excitement that ran through Rangpur town. Our stay (of Hiralal Mukherji and myself) was to be short-lived : for hardly had a fortnight elapsed, when we received an urgent wire from our friend Rabindra Narayan Ghosh recalling both of us to Calcutta for sitting in the M. A. examinations, in obedience to no less a personage’s request than that of Sir Gurudas Banerji who had assured the student-boycotters that he and other leaders were starting a Bengal National Council of Education immediately. But they wanted to tell the Government it was meant not to *supplant* but to *supplement* Government efforts of the Calcutta University. So the boycott of the University and of the examinations should not be given effect to and we must in national interest appear at the examinations. These were counsels of moderation but we had no other choice than obeying our leaders, men like Gurudas Banerji, Asutosh Choudhury, P. C. Ray, Rabindranath Tagore, Satis Chandra Mukherji, to name a few.

A princely sum of one lac of rupees had meanwhile been donated by Sj. Subodh Mullick of Creek Row, Calcutta and another big amount was being given by Brojendra Nath Choudhury, Zemindar of Gouripore in Mymensingh in aid of the National Council of Education. So we had to return to our books—the examinations were only 15 days off and for the last 4 months we had laid them aside and thrown ourselves headlong into the movement, reckless of consequences and without any thoughts of to-morrow. I remember I had left all my Shakespeare’s annotated editions and commentaries behind at Calcutta and so what could I do but get hold of a volume

of Shakespeare's collected works from the Rangpur Public Library and made it do duty instead ! We two hastened to Kurigram, a sub-divisional town in Rangpur District where my parents then were and devoted ourselves to 10 days of intensive study—Hiralal of his Physics and myself of my Literature ! Five days before the examination (in our time for the Arts men, it was a six papers' examination covering six days, the science men had their practical tests in addition) saw us back in Calcutta. I was in a desperate situation but so were the whole bunch of us—and Rabindra and myself closetted ourselves together and gave each other the benefit of our reciprocal knowledge and studies—and though it was a question of very bad preparation and of 'touch and go'—both of us eventually surprised everybody by securing first class degrees, Rabin standing first and myself a close second. Hiralal secured a second class in Physics unfortunately—went up as an apprentice on an allowance of Rs. 75/- monthly to the Empress Mills at Nagpur for textile training, stuck for five long years there to see his prospects dwindling and joined the Accounts service and rose high and is now dead and gone—one of my best chums and a thorough patriot and gentleman.

After the examination was over in early December, I proceeded home to Vikrampur. And here began a new chapter in my life. I had married into a middle-class family of Bajrajogini—a village of great historic renown, reputed to be the birth-place of Dipankar Sree Jnana, the Buddhist monk and far-famed scholar of ancient days and a big centre of Buddhist lore and practice and later on of tantric and Hindu revivalist programmes in the old days. It was part of Rampal—the capital city of the Pal Dynasty of Bengal (relics of those glorious days being still extant) and was even in 1905 a centre of culture and distinction. I came to visit my wife's people soon after I came to my village home : there I met a friend of my father-in-law, a member of the Guha zemindars of the village, who told me he could procure for me a certificate of delegation from the Vikrampur Constituency of Congress if I meant to attend the Provincial Conference which had been summoned at Barisal, where all the leading political lights of Bengal would foregather and which would be presided over by the nationalist Muslim Barrister Mr. A. Rasul.

It may be mentioned that though Lord Curzon and Sir Bamfylde

Fuller could hardly get a single Hindu to support the Partition, the East Bengal Muslims had almost to a man swallowed the bait of prospective Muslim ascendancy, of easy jobs and perquisites, of a University to be started at Dacca, of Dacca being restored to its old glory of a capital city. Sir Bamfylde called the Muslim community his 'favourite wife' and his Government spared no engines of oppression to let the Hindu nationalists down and to kill the movement. Barisal was to be a 'test case' and Sir Bamfylde and his advisers on the one side and Congress leaders led by Surendranath Banerjea, J. Chaudhury, Aurobindo Ghosh, Bepin Chandra Pal, Kaliprasanna Kavya-Bisharad and Manoranjan Guha-Thakurta of Barisal, whose servid nationalism can never be forgotten by Bengal, Krishna Kumar Mitra and others, on the other hand, prepared for the fray. But of this later on. 'There is a divinity that shapes our ends' and without any previous idea of joining the Barisal Congress, I found myself armed with a delegation certificate and with a few silver coins in my pocket, I boarded the steam-vessel that was to carry us from Narayanganj to Barisal.

To Bepin Chandra Pal I was already known as a student-leader. He introduced me to Aurobindo Ghosh, a short, squat gentleman of very modest and shy temper—the man, to whom (supposed by me to be Principal) shortly before, while he was still at the Gaekwar's College at Baroda, I had addressed a communication signifying my readiness to work as a Lecturer in English at the Baroda College in preference to accepting any government appointment in Bengal, specially as Baroda was a progressive Indian State. When I was introduced to Aurobindo Ghosh, he smiled gently and asked me if I was the young man who was the writer of that letter addressed to the Principal. Now the Principal was an Englishman and he showed my letter to Sri Aurobindo who was the Vice-Principal with the comment that national and anti-British sentiments were very rife and rampant evidently in Bengal, as the straight tone of the contents of my letter showed! So I was put at ease and we spent some pleasant time conversing together.

We reached Barisal in the morning and were billeted at the Hostel of the Brojomohan College founded by Aswini Kumar Dutt. The open Conference was to meet that very afternoon. After meals, we marched to an open plot of land about a mile from the Con-

ference Pandal—called *Raja Bahadur's Haveli* and were formed into lines and asked to proceed in ordered formation to the Pandal, along the broad streets. The shouting of our national cry 'Bande Mataram' had been interdicted by a Government Circular (the Emerson Circular ?) sometime before and it had been decided that every delegate should cry 'Bande Mataram' as he proceeded. What was our surprise when at the first shout of Bande Mataram as the procession was just marching out of the open space, before which was a broad street flanked by a tank, policemen set on the first line of delegates and belaboured them with lathis, then proceeded to deal with the second and third lines of delegates—all unarmed—who had by this time gone out to the street, with broken and bleeding heads. One of Monoranjan Guha-Thakurta's sons, Chittaranjan, who was profusely bleeding but continued to shout 'Bande Mataram', was being mercilessly belaboured by the constabulary and thrown into the tank flanking the street ! The District Magistrate and the Police Superintendent, both Englishmen (Emerson and Kemp were their names, if my memory does not betray me) were in the melee : I was in the fourth line and that line had not yet been attacked by the police. Meanwhile Surendranath Banerjea and J. Chaudhury were having an altercation with these two English officials and I found Bepin Chandra Pal and Chaudhury holding the reins of their two ponies and preventing them from proceeding further into our formations. Surendranath and Chaudhury were at once put under arrest and summarily fined Rs. 50/- each after a mock trial by the Magistrate held in a small room which was possibly police quarters or had been requisitioned for these purposes. Meanwhile, the whole body of processionists numbering several hundred—all the delegation to the Conference, that is—marched under our leaders' orders to the Pandal in slow silence with the severely mauled and bandaged Chittaranjan in front helped by volunteers. There was wild excitement and tremendous resentment accompanied with steeled enthusiasm in the audience of thousands assembled in the Conference, when we marched in. Surendranath and J. Chaudhury joined the Conference shortly after and the cheering of the heroes and the indignation against Government were unbounded. Mr. Rasul read his dignified address in an atmosphere of tense silence—he was the pioneer of the nationalist Muslim movement in Bengal and in sweet-

ness of character, dignity of manner, depth of patriotism, Rasul has hardly been surpassed by any Muslim leader. It was reported that Sir Bamfylde's Government launch had arrived with himself on board and was moored off the Barisal river-ghat and that he had issued orders to treat the rebels with utmost severity. Anyway, the Conference passed resolutions of country-wide boycott of British goods, establishment of national agencies of education and of the nation's determination to carry on the fight till the partition would be reversed and Bengal would again be one,—United Bengal as of old. This was my 'fire-baptism' in politics and Barisal has thus been to me for ever a place of pilgrimage where I was initiated into the Swadeshi *mantram* in an atmosphere of brutal governmental repression of the most unashamed variety.

Meanwhile, I had become a member of the 'Anti-Circular Society' started in Calcutta principally by Rama Kanta Roy (who had been trained in Japan for industrial activity, had come back and joined the movement) and Sachindra Prasad Basu of 'Rangpur fame'. The Society's business, besides organising agitation against the repressive Circulars of Fuller's administration, was to push on the boycott and create markets for 'Swadeshi' goods and products by opening sales bureaus and show-rooms and by propaganda in rural areas by itinerant bands.

I returned to Kurigram and opened a branch there and carried on these activities for sometime. I had to give them up, however, at the request of my respected father whose position in the service of Government was being jeopardised by his son's activities and who had been served with several warnings already.

It was 1906 : I was a first class M. A. at the age of 21 and was ripe for the teaching profession. And here begins a fresh chapter in my life when for 15 years, as a College teacher in Patna, Sylhet and several places in Bengal proper, I could be of some service to the rising generation of students who came after us to be either the torch-bearers of the New Political Dispensation of the Congress or henchmen and parasites of the foreign Government, according to the training they received.

## CHAPTER III

### 15 YEARS AS COLLEGE TEACHER

(1906—1921)

Six months after I took my M. A., I was appointed a Professor of English Literature in the Bihar National College (B. N. College), Patna, affiliated to Calcutta and founded by Babu Saligram Sing, a munificent Rajput Zemindar of Bihar. I was asked to have an interview with one of the younger members of the family who was practising as an advocate in the Calcutta High Court and was living in Ripon Street. He was rather surprised to see a very youngish man (I was barely 21 then) and he could be reassured as to my identity when he was presented with my M. A. University diploma. He asked me to join as early as I could and gave me a letter of appointment and also a letter of introduction to Babu Bisweshwar Sing, who was a lawyer practising at Patna and lived close to the College in the family bungalow. I was to be Mr. Sing's guest till a convenient house could be arranged for me.

I joined early in July, 1906. I was treated with the utmost courtesy and hospitality and introduced to the Principal, Mr. Devendra Nath Sen, who has retired from the College full of years and honours and is now an octogenarian and still living in Patna. Shortly after, another gentleman who was to be my life-long friend, Lalit Kumar Ghose (he is dead now, after one year's Principalship at the old B. N. College which he served loyally and after rendering yeoman's service to the new Patna University, as a member of the Senate, Syndicate and Boards of Studies) joined as Professor of Mathematics. He taught Physics also. We soon took a house and started our own establishment. We found another close friend in Professor Kamakshya Nath Mitra who had put in several years as Professor of English already at the College. We three became inseparable chums so long as I was at Patna (which was for 7 months only) and entertained each other, had our afternoon walks together and altogether enjoyed our lives in serious as well as light conversations, in dinners, and excursions. The prestige of Bengalis was

still very high in Bihar and we received uttermost courtesy everywhere.

The College was a first grade college, with affiliation in English Honours. The numerical strength of students was about 350 or so : it was housed in a busy locality in the central road leading from old Patna city to the modern town called Bankipore and was not very far from the famous Oriental Khuda Bux Library. The students were very well-behaved but the funny thing was that I was confronted with pupils, some of whom must have been about 30 years of age. But these gave the least trouble. One of my early pupils in the 4th year was Indu Prokas Banerji (of the Brahmo faith) who met such a tragic end in the 'Titanic' disaster. Another was Biswambhar Dayal who rose to be Public Prosecutor at Patna and died prematurely—he was an Honours boy. The College was supposed to be a rival to the Government College, Patna, but was very poorly equipped (for lack of funds) as regards libraries and science laboratories. I was just a new man : this was my first apprenticeship as a college lecturer and I was expected to teach mostly out of my head ! Principal Son was very kind and asked me to take advantage of the Patna College Library. I, however, thought it derogatory for me to approach the Government College people for loans of necessary reference-books and managed somehow. A few of the boys were fairly efficient and equipped for college studies : the majority were very weak in English and those of them that had come from the mofussil areas could hardly read English with any proper accent and their pronunciation was horrible ! I remember to have tested their reading one day and asked them to read out the first stanza of Milton's Paradise Lost, Bk. I. Boy after boy stood up and made a series of noises which were no more English than Arabic ! The thing is they read English with their Bihari Hindi twang and no Englishman could have caught a single syllable of their reading. However, I persevered. I was put on to teaching History—a subject I had never read beyond the First Arts Course and had well-nigh forgotten. I carried on with the Histories of Greece and Rome in a manner—but it could not be called teaching. One thing I found out—that the sins of student-day omission and negligence were bound to bear fruit in after-days and I had to re-study many things I had slurred over or skipped as a student. In fact, my command of

{English style when I put pen to paper was not very much below mark, but my knowledge of books and recollection of references was not so deep. I had never been a voracious reader but rather alert and quick of memory and good at presentation of what I knew. I had the art of concealing my ignorance from examiners and that is another great art in passing written examinations.

Seven months passed off and I left not with any bad reputation—meanwhile, the young wives of Lalit and myself had joined our establishment and we had moved into a new house where fun and frolic and intense cordiality were the order of the day.

The acquaintance I made with Professor Jadu Nath Sarkar, Professor Jyoti Bhusan Bhaduri and Professor D. N. Mallik at Patna was profitable and carried on into after-days. All of them were brilliant Professors, and Jadu Nath Sarkar was already making his reputation as a historical researcher and scholar by his volumes on Moghul Emperors, for which he received much material from the Khuda Bux Library. I had occasion to speak on Milton in a short compass at the Patna College when my colleague, Professor Mitra read a paper on Milton with Professor D. N. Mallik in the Chair : this was my first venture in public speaking, so far as I remember, beyond my lectures in college.

The seven months of my life at Patna were really a period of training for college lecturing : I was by temperament rather restless and was longing for a change. The college with its slender resources did not appeal to me, having just left the portals of the Calcutta Presidency College, compared to which this was only a big school without much of what we call a 'college atmosphere'. A friend wrote to me that they were in search of a good Professor of English at the Raja's College at Sylhet and the emoluments were to be higher than at Patna. I had not much of an idea of whether Sylhet had any railway communication from Calcutta and what sort of a College it was, but I accepted the job and left by the fag-end of February, 1907 for Sylhet via Calcutta with my small family of three, including a widowed aunt and a younger brother of 12, who was at school.

On correspondence {with the College Principal, I was given to understand that railway communication from Calcutta was via Goalundo to Chandpur by steamer and thence by the Assam-Bengal Railway up to Karimganj, a sub-divisional town of Sylhet District.

From Karimganj, where I was assured, an intelligent College peon would be waiting for us, the journey would be by boat for about 2 days, then three miles of land-journey, and after that 12 hours' journey by boat to Sylhet town which was on the Surma river.

I still recollect this adventure of three days—how we hired a convenient and large boat after we had cooked and dined at Karimganj kutchery and how we halted at inspection bungalows on the way and had hastily cooked meals, and how we were put on land on the morning of the third day after a pretty long journey of about 40 hours : how we found that we must walk the three miles in a strange country,—there was no conveyance whatsoever—only we found men to carry our luggage (the heavy luggage had been dispatched from Patna to Sylhet via Chhatak, famous for its trade in lime-stone, by the I. G. S. N. steamer service)—and accompanied by our peon, the party of four, total strangers to the life of the place and its customs and the nature of its dwellers, made the three miles, without seeing much evidence of villages or village-folk near about, but without molestation of any sort. Any party of three or four robbers could have snatched away our belongings and put us in jeopardy—the tract was so lonely. We then came to another river, hired a boat and reached the landing-ghat at Sylhet almost at dusk. A small house of 2 thatched cottages, the bigger one with white-washed walls of bamboo, partitioned into two rooms, on the side of a tank had been requisitioned for me—near which was the mess-house where the Principal and two other Professors lived. There was also the house of the Civil Sub-Judge, who turned out to be an old gentleman, who in his earlier days as a school-master had taught my father and belonged to our parts, and who was living with his wife. There were besides a few other houses whose dwellers were old settlers or old residents and worked as managers of zemindars or in the Civil Courts. We had no trouble : but our heavy luggage in which were included our cooking and dining utensils were still on the I. G. S. N. steamer and there was no knowing when they would reach—it might take 15 days, it might take a month, we were told. We were entertained on the evening of our arrival by friends and next morning we got a loan of all necessary utensils from neighbours and so we started.

The College I found to be nothing more than an extension of the

big High School founded by Raja Giris Chandra Roy, a Sylhet zemindar : in the same compound with the school, the two college classes (Intermediate) with an annexe for science teaching of a most perfunctory character and a small library which was an apology for a library, were located in *kutcha* sheds. There were six teachers in the College Department and some of them took higher school classes also. The town, however, then a mere assemblage of mostly *kutcha* houses, with the law-courts, the police lines, the jail, the quarters of the Magistrate, the Judge, the Police Superintendent and the Civil Surgeon and the hospital, a small public library—was a straggling affair—with big open spaces—and there were a few *pucca* (brick-built) houses of the Muslim and Hindu zemindars and several old mosques of some grandeur ; but it was a town of hillocks and many of the houses perched on the small hillocks made a nice picture. The old Raja—he was only a titled zemindar, supposed to be a Vaishnava, but very fond of company and good living and fond of European dishes—took to me at once. I was so young and he told me that the only other Professor who was there long ago and who was also very young like me was Kalika Das Dutt, who later on rose to be Dewan of the feudatory State of Cooch Behar and was a noted man of the generation just preceding ours. And here something happened which I must relate, to point a moral.

I was invited to dine one evening by the Raja and I accepted the invitation with gladness—it was a mark of courtesy and should be reciprocated, and the Raja was all kindness and courtesy. I came back after a sumptuous dinner in mixed Indian and European style with a lot of fruits and chocolates and some of these latter were pressed on me for my young wife by the Raja before I left. He had sent his carriage for me and he sent me back by the same carriage. What was my surprise next day to be told by my colleagues and also by a nice oldish gentleman who was a man of influence and the District Judge's right hand man, being his *Sheristadar* (head of the office in charge of all office files and documents) that I must not say anything about my having dined with the Raja—for he was a Saha, while I was a Brahmin ! And if anybody asked me about it, I must conceal the fact of the dinner absolutely and utter a blatant falsehood, denying that I had any invitation to the Raja's house at all ! If I did not do like that, I ran the risk of being ostracised by the

Hindu community of Sylhet ! I could not persuade myself to accept their advice and said I was never trained in falsehood and whatever might be the consequences, I would certainly own up about the dinner. Things, however, shaped in such a manner as to leave no room for these developments—for in a day or two, an advertisement for an officiating Professor of English for the Calcutta Presidency College was brought to my notice by my colleagues who persisted in advising me to apply. I was very doubtful of getting the appointment, for I had passed out only a year ago, though from the Presidency College, where Professor Percival entertained a very good opinion of my attainments. Mr. Little was then Principal and I applied to him and sent a wire to Professor Percival, telling him of my application and requesting his recommendation to Principal Little. I expected nothing—but in a week's time, I got a wire from the Principal asking me to join early. I had no other option than to request the Raja to accept my resignation : at first he was unwilling but when I told him of my prospects there, he relented. I had hardly been one month at Sylhet, my heavy goods had not yet arrived : my aunt helped me to give some little entertainment to neighbours whose hospitality we had received ; and packing our things and accompanied by the very same peon who had escorted us to Sylhet, we left early in April, 1907 back for Calcutta—and I joined the Presidency College as the youngest man on the staff on 10th April.

I still recollect the events of that day. The Presidency College had then a very high prestige and the prestige was shared by members of the teaching staff. A Presidency College Professor or Lecturer took high rank in the Indian community forty years ago. The rank was as high as that of any successful member of the bar and not very much below the prestige of a junior member of the I.C.S. For, the men were picked men, who might have risen high in any other of the 'black-coated' professions.

It was with mixed feelings of gratification and reserve that I put on my flowing '*choga and chapkan*', in which those of us who did not care for European dress, used to attire themselves and presented myself before the Principal's office by 11 a.m. I was taken to Principal Little (he was a very jolly man and an able Professor of Mathematics with a keen sense of humour) by the Head Assistant

who knew me as one of the best scholars of the college. Before this, we already had a private talk inside the office (the Head Assistant and myself) as regards the classes I was to take ; and we agreed that I had better ask for the B.A. and F.A. classes rather than the M.A. which also had been taken by my predecessor, my old teacher Professor J. N. Das Gupta. Professor Das Gupta had been drafted to the Hooghly College as Principal and the officiating vacancy arose in that chain. I was introduced to Mr. Little by the Head Assistant and he was very cordial and put me at ease at once. He asked me if I would be prepared to step into Professor Das Gupta's shoes at once and if I felt myself competent to take all his classes, including the M.A. I gathered my wits about me and told him if it was a question of competence, I felt I was quite ready to lecture to the M.A. students, but would it not be better, I suggested shyly, from the disciplinary point of view, not to put me there, as I had left College only in 1905 and there must be among the M.A. men a pretty good number of old chums (although my juniors) of the Eden Hindu Hostel groups, who might be inclined to take liberties ? He agreed and then I suggested that the M.A. classes be transferred to Professor M. Ghosh (another of my old Dacca College teachers, who was now in the Presidency College) and I might be put in for B.A. and F.A. He agreed to this also and wished me good luck.

I came to the Professors' sitting-room and here I was given a very loving welcome by all my old teachers, Professor Percival, who was very sparing of words, uttering gruffly only one sentence 'So, you are here.' It was his recommendation that, of course, had put me there, but my revered Professor was never demonstrative, and he had a heart of gold. The college summer recess was very near and if it had been a commercial college run on very economic lines, my appointment would have materialised from June, the beginning of the next session.

I remember to have lectured not more than twice to the 4th year men and these 'maiden' lectures were on the spirit and evolution of English poetry of the Romantic School and as I would have to teach Palgrave's 'Golden Treasury of Songs and Lyrics' Bk. IV, this was quite an appropriate theme for preparatory lecturing. I understood that the manner and matter of my lectures had impressed my class and as first impressions about a teacher's efficient handling of

his subject and his general expression always last, I had thenceforth an easy time of it in my old college.\* On the teaching staff were Professor Percival, Prof. M. Ghosh, Professor W. C. Wordsworth

\* Amongst the bright ones I had the privilege of teaching in my early years of lecturing at the Presidency College were—Kshitish Chandra Sen (K.C. Sen, I.C.S.) who was the best student of the English class and who distinguished himself by his English exercise at Oxford also and who now adorns the High Court Bench at Bombay as a Judge : him I met on two occasions when at Bombay during my advanced years, when I visited Bombay as a member of the Education Sub-Committee of the National Planning Committee and he was so respectful and so loving !—Ramesh Chandra Majumdar was another, who has recently retired from the Vice-Chancellorship of the University of Dacca and who, though not very bright at the outset, improved steadily and made his name as a conscientious researcher in History even while very young and is now known all over the country as a distinguished historian. Another is Dr. Subodh Mukherji, who after a rather short but brilliant record as Calcutta University Post-Graduate lecturer joined the Finance Department of the Government of India, rose to be Asst. Accountant General—but resigned, as this mechanical work did not suit him, in spite of high emoluments—and is now Head of the Oriental Research Section at the Benaras Hindu University. A very shy but promising pupil of these days was S. K. Halder, who was the youngest boy of the B.A. stage as I was the youngest Professor, and who has risen in the I.C.S. as Divisional Commissioner and Member of the Board of Revenue and is due to retire shortly. He was the son of Dr. Hirralal Halder, the celebrated Hegelian scholar and Philosophy Professor. Another was S. C. Sen, who died prematurely after rising to be Accountant General, Bengal. Dr. Sushil Kumar De and Dr. Sures Chandra Gupta were two others—of whom Gupta after rising to be Inspector of Schools in the Assam Education Service died and Dr. De is a Professor of Oriental Languages and the Head of the Sanskrit and Bengali Departments at the University of Dacca and has earned deserved renown as a finished scholar and researcher. But I have forgotten to mention the most scholarly of these old pupils—one year their senior, who read with me only for a very short spell in the Presidency College—was Dr Radha Kamal Mukherji, now Head of the Economics Department at Lucknow University, one who has earned not only an all-India but international reputation by virtue of his original, painstaking and pioneer work in many branches of Economics, Indian Economics, Sociology and Ecology and who is always consulted by the Provincial Government of U. P. and the Government of India on economic questions. He was also one of those who came under the magic spell of the savant-sage Satis Chandra Mukherji of the Dawn Society as a young College lad and has more than justified the promise of his younger days. I mention a few who are in touch with me even to this day—there must be some others who have distinguished themselves in the Bar and the Bench or been absorbed into Government services and practically lost in their welter of files and dockets and pigeon holes !

(now Editor of the 'Statesman'—he resigned from the Education Service after rising to be Principal of the Presidency College and officiating as Director of Public Instruction), Professor Cunningham who later on became Director of Public Instruction in Assam (both Mr. Wordsworth and Mr. Cunningham joined when I joined) and Professor Prafulla Chandra Ghosh, two years my senior at College, a devoted scholar who had just secured the Prem Chand Roy Chand Scholarship and came back to education after a year only in the Executive Service as Deputy Magistrate and who and I became great friends at once, a friendship that has lasted to the end of our careers. He earned a great name for himself as a very able and scholarly teacher, who had only two interests in life—Literature and Music, retired with honours amidst the regrets of hundreds of his later-day pupils and had his marble statue erected at the Presidency College by his old and new pupils.

The strange irony about my Government appointment was that it was fated that I would be 'protected' as a servant of the usurping Government for 14 long years by Divine grace till in the fulness of time I was to be launched again on the high seas of political strife and struggle, after my year's apprenticeship in 1905-1906. The Professor who took to me most was Sir P. C. Ray—then simple P. C. Ray. He was in the Department of Chemistry, but his interests in Literature were deep and abiding and though in those days, most of the Science teachers kept to their laboratories and retiring-rooms on the ground floor and hardly came up to join us in the sitting-room (meant for all) on the first floor, P. C. Ray was a constant visitor. Sir J. C. Bose was a very occasional visitor and the European Professors infected with the anti-Indian virus like Professor Jackson never came upstairs at all. Professor Benoyendranath Sen was at his post and as he was Editor of the newly started Presidency College Magazine under official auspices (the Magazine we started in 1904 was a private affair, recognised but not financed by the College), we came into intimate touch—for at his request, I contributed two or three articles—one, I believe, was on John Ruskin. There was also the scholarly, modest and unassuming Satis Chandra Vidyabhusan of the Sanskrit Department who was amongst the very first amongst Bengali scholars to steer on the paths of research into Tibetan and Pali scripts and sources. He often requisitioned my help in rewriting and

revising the English of his articles meant for research journals. The learned orientalist's handling of the English language was very unsure and I had to cut through his composition mercilessly and rewrite sentence after sentence. He was always exceedingly grateful for my unselfish labours and was very friendly. Such a model of modesty I have rarely met amongst Indian scholars. He died young and his death was a loss to the learned world.

There was another friend, Hem Chandra Das Gupta, Demonstrator-Lecturer at the Geology Section. He was a neighbour like Pandit Vidyabhusan—my first rented lodgings (arranged for me by my father-in-law the late Jamini Kanta Mukherji, a graduate of the old days of the Dacca College and Second Assistant to the Board of Revenue, a man of character and honesty, very efficient and very popular with his colleagues in his big establishment) were in Brojo Nath Dutt Lane and then in Arpuli Lane, very near the portion of College Street abutting on the Calcutta Medical College—and Professor Das Gupta was a constant chum, inviting us to his place and being invited in return. He was in touch with Prithwis Ray, a disciple of Surendranath and for long years his co-adjutor on the 'Bengalee', who was running a monthly English Magazine of repute—"The Indian World" and got me to write for it. I remember having written several reviews of books for this journal anonymously—it was a nationalist organ and it would have been risky to have appended my name to my contributions.

Then there were Professors D. N. Mallik and Sarada Prasanna Das (of Mathematics), Chandra Bhushan Bhaduri of Chemistry, Charuchandra Bhattacharya (he was an assistant of J. C. Bose) and the Professors of Sanskrit and Arabic and Persian with most of whom I was on very intimate terms. My social qualities ingrained in me by boyhood training helped me and I was a general favourite. After sometime Professor H. R. James came from Patna and joined as Principal—he who came later to grief, because he had asserted his prerogatives fully as Principal (like the Master of Balliol at Oxford and others of his ilk) of the Presidency College during the 'Oaten Affair' in 1916, (when the anti-Indian Professor Oaten in a moment of irritation had expressed his contempt of his 'coloured' Indian pupils in his lecture-class at the Presidency College and was assaulted and shoe-beaten (?) by some of his 'irate' pupils ; Subhas

Bose, it was reported, truly or falsely I do not know, was implicated). I was then Professor in the Rajshahi Government College in North Bengal. Later there was a Commission of Enquiry who sat in judgment on Principal James. Principal James came in for some censure and resigned in disgust and went away to England. He also taught English and had a few educational publications to his credit. He was a scholarly, upright man without any racial bias whatsoever and he took most kindly to me. He liked my straight-forward ways and he had a good opinion of my abilities as a teacher. Once—only once, I believe,—the students of a class organised a little bit of a racketting during my lecture and I ran up to Principal James and he quieted the class at once by holding me up in very high terms before them and asking them not to take advantage of my extreme youth, telling them most sweetly that some of the learners of to-day might be teachers and at the Presidency College itself in 3 or 4 years after taking their M.A. brilliantly as I had done. As the appointment in the Presidency College which I held on an officiating basis was only for the period during which Professor J. N. Das Gupta would hold office as Principal at Hooghly, Principal James as soon as he became acting Director of Public Instruction, wrote to me from Darjeeling offering me a job on Rs. 200/- (the Presidency College appointment was for Rs. 150/- only) at the Sanskrit College for which a Professor of English had just been sanctioned by Government; and when I wrote back asking his advice as to eventual choice between his kind offer and the offer I had received from the Rajshahi College, then under the newly constituted Government of Eastern Bengal, on Rs. 200/- but on a permanent basis in the Provincial Service Cadre—Principal James asked me not to worry about his offer but to take the surer one! Others in his position might not have been so helpful and fatherly.

I taught Tennyson and Milton and Ruskin's 'Crown of Wild Olive' in the First Arts classes and Milton and Byron in the B.A. But besides lecturing, I used to follow in the steps of my revered Professor H. M. Percival and set the 3rd year boys to write exercises and essays on certain topics and as a result the pupils and the teacher were brought nearer together and I could make a mental note of the really bright ones. It is thus that I picked up the really

promising ones and have followed their careers with love and interest, a sentiment which these pupils have also appreciated. In fact, the greatest solace of my life is not that I came in for a certain measure of celebrity as Congress worker and agitator fighting in the front rank during 1921-33 and as a journalist whose editorials were not mere 'journalese' but had some literary and idealistic flavour (this was at least the opinion of many—not the least being Rabindranath Tagore, P. C. Ray and Satis Chandra Mukherji)—but that I have been cherished in the memory and confirmed in the love and regard of my pupils, bright and mediocre, who fill and have filled all ranks of life in Bengal—from High Court Judges and Divisional Commissioners and other subordinate ranks to small and big officials even in the Police and the Intelligence Services, members of the Bar and the teaching profession, Doctors and Engineers—not to speak of those select spirits who have braved all risks in the service of Mother India and suffered transportation and imprisonment most gladly for the cause.

The officiating job at the Presidency College terminated in June 1909 ; and shortly after, I joined as a full Professor at the Rajshahi College.

But certain interesting events happened during my tenure of office at the Presidency College which should not be passed over. The trial of Aurobindo Ghosh, Barin Ghosh, Upen Banerji and others (known as the Maniktolla Bomb Case) began in the High Court in 1907-8 and what were my feelings when a notice asking me to serve on the Special Jury in this case was served on me ! Fortunately I was not empanelled and was absolved of a great mental tug-of-war—for I was the same confirmed sinner baptised in the waters of nationalism as in 1905 and if the job in the Presidency College had been under Sir Bamfylde Fuller's Government in Eastern Bengal, I could never have got it—for there would have been a searching Police enquiry and my past activities would have been brought out and arrayed against my getting any appointment under Government (and quite rightly too). Only Providence had in His mysterious dispensation played a humorous trick on the British administration and placed an anti-British rebel in a situation where as a teacher of youth he would be of some service to the popular cause and of no usefulness (rather the reverse) to

the foreign usurping clique ! I had, I have forgotten to mention, been one of the recipients of Kali Prasanna Kavya-Visharad's medals struck for outstanding national service in the struggle of 1905-6 and this would have strengthened the case against me !

But there is such a thing as Destiny, and Destiny willed it and arranged it that I should be in the bigger colleges of Government in Bengal for 14 long years, doing my duties fearlessly, teaching thousands of boys the lessons of self-respect and patriotic endeavour and giving the call for a 'dedicated' life openly through class lectures on Burke and Milton and Byron and Shelley and Ruskin—those apostles of Freedom and Democracy—and through encouragement of the study of English Literature and its classics and of ancient History and archaeology and also through social meets, physical culture clubs, nursing and fire-fighting associations and public lectures and addresses on the great savants and sages of India.

The *Bande-Mataram*, that English daily paper whose editorials were written by a panel of Editors of whom Aurobindo Ghosh, Sailen Ghosh (he was in the 'Home' service and had resigned his job in England and came over and joined in the national struggle), Syam Sundar Chakravarti and Hemendra Prasad Ghose formed the core—and were always bright and full of patriotic fervour—used to be on our table in the Professors' sitting room in the Presidency College. I believe myself and Prafulla Chandra Ghosh were the subscribers—and ostentatiously and openly we read the virulently anti-British paper in the British Lion's own den—the Presidency College meant for training up loyalist administrators and servants of British Imperialism—in sight of the English colleagues. In later days, conduct like this would not be tolerated and there would have been very few to take the risk of being openly branded as sympathisers with the National Cause.

I spent a little over two years at the Presidency College and it was one of the pleasant portions of my life—for the Englishman's arrogance, at least in the cultured departments like Education, was not yet so pronounced and the 1905 movement had overawed many an Englishman and Scotsman coming over to our slave-country. Just on the eve of my taking leave of the Presidency College, my eldest son, Benoyendranath (who is now a distinguished Professor of Economics and Politics at Calcutta, an able public worker, writer,

and speaker and connected with many organisations and institutions) was born in May, 1909 in the house in Arpuli Lane, which still exists, though with certain building alterations during the last 37 years' interval.

The new acquaintances I formed when at the Presidency College were Principal Ramendra Sundar Trivedi (of Ripon College—one of the most scholarly and patriotic and unassuming men I have ever known), Principal N. N. Ghosh, of the Metropolitan Institution (now the Vidyasagar College) and Pandit Sivanath Sastri. My intimacy with Sj. Satis Mukherjee continued and I came to know Sir Asutosh Mookerjee and his great charm and personality.

These two years left their impress on me even afterwards. As a young man, I had mixed intimately in Calcutta society—I had worked alongside of men like Percival, James, J. C. Bose, P. C. Ray, M. Ghosh. I had taken the measure of contemporaneous young Professors from Oxford or Cambridge or London. I had not deviated by a hair's breadth from my views and opinions on men and movements and the result was that when I joined Rajshahi College in 1909, I became the virtual leader and 'idol' of the students, their mentor and their guide; I infused the College with ideas of self-respect and national worth and national service, became a link between the town and the gown, helped other colleagues in standing on their dignity before better-paid but certainly less cultured Government Executive and Judicial officers (including I.C.S. men). But of all this later.

The Rajshahi Government College (the official name of the civil station was Rampur-Boalia) was the only college then in North Bengal : the Carmichael College, Rangpur was started in 1916 mainly owing to the herculean efforts and the finances raised throughout the District from big and small zemindars, *Jotedars*, tolerably rich peasant-farmers and business men by two successive District Magistrates, K. C. De and J. N. Gupta. Other colleges have also been established since, notably at Dinajpur, Jalpaiguri, Bogra. But the Government College at Rajshahi which grew from small proportions to its present size and usefulness was even in 1909 not too big an affair. When I joined, it had a roll-strength of not more than 350, which, however, swelled by the time I left early in January 1917, to full one thousand. The staff was almost trebled and affiliations

in Honours were received in almost every Arts and Science subject (barring Botany, Geology and Zoology). The College was 100 p.c. under Swadeshi control—everybody from the Principal to the juniormost peon or orderly being Indian : only the President of the Governing Body was by regulation the District Magistrate and he was always, in those times, a European I.C.S. The College owed its quick development principally to the organising and financing ability and tact and devotion of Kumudini Kanta Banerji, a first class M.A. of Physics of his time, who had succeeded a long train of white Principals and who set himself to the task of enlisting vigorous popular support of the Rajshahi zemindar families and of the gentry on behalf of the College. The Dighapatia and Puthia zemindars were induced to make some handsome contributions. With those sums hostels inside the college compound were built, ensuring close and efficient supervision by the Principal and staff ; gradually a big and spacious Common-Room in a separate but near-by plot followed and on showing of such effective local support, Government was also prevailed upon to sanction the building of a big Physics Laboratory and lecture-rooms which were very well-equipped, and the release of the old combined Laboratories for Chemistry work only. There was a Sanskrit College attached to the main college with a complement of learned Pundits with the Principal as final Head and also a Muslim Madrassah and a hostel for Madrassah students. The College was almost on the banks of the wide-flowing, picturesque river Padma and it had a tank and flower-gardens and, later on, electric installation. Within 4 or 5 years of my joining, the College was staffed by a galaxy of very able Professors—of whom any College might be proud—men like Krishna Chandra Bhattacharya in Philosophy, Santosh Kumar Chatterji in History, Panchanan Neogi and Asutosh Maitra in Chemistry, the Principal and his able colleagues in Physics, Raj Mohan Sen in Mathematics, Ghullam Yazdani (who has recently retired from the post of Director-General of Archaeology under H.E.H. the Nizam's Government at Hyderabad) in Persian and Arabic, to name some of the stalwarts. On the English side were Professor Jatindra Guha (a very able teacher, who died at only 52, when he was Professor in the Presidency College), Professor Ramapada Majumdar (my friend and contemporary, also a very able teacher) and myself—later on we had

a Muslim gentleman, Mr. Rabaman who was also a bright man.

To the College flocked students not only from North Bengal, (and after the fillip given to Muslim education consequent on the creation of the New Province, Muslim students joined in increasingly large number till by 1915 and, '16 they were 33 p.c. of the total strength of thousand, about 350 in number, mostly the sons of peasant-proprietors, who had never received any English or even indigenous education but were sturdy wealthy peasants of strong common sense cultivating from 100 to 500 acres of land)—but from East Bengal Districts—from Dacca, Barisal, Faridpur, Mymensingh, even from far off Chittagong and Comilla.

The waves of the Swadeshi movement were still in full swell—and the open movement of negative boycott and positive and constructive Swadeshi—thwarted and repressed with all the engines of law and un-law at the disposal of a Government to which the vast majority of the virile and patriotic Hindu population were hostile—had run underground and revolutionary and terrorist groups and cells, had been formed in every district in Bengal, and Rajshahi was no exception. A College with a contingent of 1,000 students, 700 of them of Hindu extraction and thus already inoculated with anti-British and pro-country ideas and enthused and fired by legends of the early revolutionaries, most of whom had been hanged or transported for life to the penal settlement of the Andamans, was a very convenient recruiting-ground for revolutionary purposes and, as later on was found out by Government agencies, Rajshahi College was the centre of North Bengal revolutionary recruiting and activity and Jatin Roy, a graduate teacher of the most self-less character and a most engaging personality, was the leader who had his agents and followers throughout North Bengal and specially at Rajshahi. But our boys were very nice—the nicest I have met anywhere : they organised fire-fighting services (there was and still is no fire-brigade at Rajshahi and other mofussil towns, the Government is so antediluvian), nursing services, clubs of physical culture inside the College and the hostels and attached messes and in near-by localities, study-circles mostly centering round the Gita, Vivekananda's lectures and sermons, *Ramkrishna-Kathamrita* (a book unequalled for pithy and illuminating religious and moral pronouncements and nice and original

parables), Aswini Kumar Dutt's *Bhakti Yoga* (the discipline of devotional morality), Bankim Chandra's *Ananda Math*, the *vade macum* of all Bengal revolutionary youth, Rabindranath's and D. L. Roy's rousing songs of patriotism and D. L. Roy's historical dramas full of direct and indirect appeals to patriotic effort, the lifestory of Mazzini and Garibaldi, the stories of the Irish Revolutionary effort, and also books on the rise of Japan to power. These were activities to which no administration could raise any legitimate objection and which we of the staff actively encouraged and supported. The leader of students was Dharendra Ghatak, who was subjected to terrible suffering later on and the underground organisation had apparently permeated a large section of the student-body ; for in 1916, when World War No. I was still on, there was a big intelligence department drive and about 100 of our students were taken away and interned in different camps or individually throughout the Province—Dhiren Ghatak and a few others being segregated in the *char* of Kutubdia in Chittagong on an estuary of the Bay of Bengal.

The College athletics and sports side were first-rate like its social service activities. We had 6 boats on the river (two British made and 4 country boats) for boating exercises and excursions—the social functions like Saraswati Puja and Vivekananda Memorial celebrations were very well-organised and financed and on one occasion the boys themselves cooked meals for 1,000 beggars and fed them. The fact is, the College had grown to be a real power in the town and the District—it was almost like a State within a State, and we instilled into the boys and breathed with our nostrils the hygienic air of Freedom. The fear of Europeans had evaporated and boys could with great difficulty be persuaded to show common courtesies to European District officials. The Principal was a very astute and tactful man and he kept matters smooth by all the arts of diplomacy at his command, giving us fullest freedom to shape and train the boys on really national lines. The success was phenomenal and some of our nice Indian friends who had been trained in Europe and joined as officials without being swallowed up by officialdom told us frankly that Rajshahi College boys could be distinguished anywhere : they had a stamp of their own. The boys were so nice that during journeys during vacations, they would insist on carrying our (their Professors') luggage on their shoulders and

scare away station porters. They would invite themselves to Professors' houses and invade the domestic kitchens and get fed by their 'mothers'—the Professors' wives. They would invite the ladies to their entertainments and I had to take the lead in taking those that were agreeable and of progressive ideas to those (*purdah* in 1909 or '15 was still a living custom in Bengal). The University results were good, the boys were not negligent but took full advantage of our presence or nearness and came to us for help.

I shall narrate certain 'inside' stories about college events and their repercussions which have never been made public and these will show the temper and spirit of the Rajshahi College of 1909-17.

The first incident that comes up to my memory is regarding a tussle between an Anglo-Indian member of the Superior Police Force and the College Professors sometime in 1912. This man lived in a house close to where Dr. Panchanan Neogi and myself lived, not very far away from the quarters of the European officials, though our area was inhabited by Bengalis—Hindus and Muslims—the most distinguished being the junior branch of the Dighapatia Zemindars—Kumar Sarat Kumar Roy, who lived in a rented house and Kumar Hemendra Kumar Roy who had his own house on the other side of the road. This area was close to the river and along the river-bank from the College end of the town to the Courts (a distance of over 2 miles and over) was a protective embankment built by the P.W.D. on which pedestrians were allowed to walk, the District Board road for traffic of all sorts and for the general body of foot-walkers including cyclists ran almost parallel several feet below this high embankment. We, Professors of the College, in groups of 10 and 12 used to take our morning and evening constitutionals along the *bund* and we often sat down after a mile-walk and chatted and exchanged views up till dusk when we went back to our houses. This Anglo-Indian Police Officer was a neighbour but he lived apart and never exchanged a word with us—he was a member of the European Club (there were not very many Europeans in a country station and they had admitted him to membership as a matter of convenience). He was a member of the Police Force and he carried himself high and mighty. Well, this man began a rather nasty trick. He started pedalling on his cycle on the embankment on his way to the Club (in absolute contempt of rules of the road

—the bund was never meant for cyclists) and the bund being not very wide, he ran his cycle almost into our midst and never cared a bit (for courtesy and convenience) to think that we had to betake ourselves to corners of the bund, with every chance of falling down several feet. We bore with him for several days and then one of us hit on a very novel idea of teaching him manners. It was Professor Santosh Kumar Chatterji, of the History Department, (an old pupil of Aswini Kumar Dutt of Barisal and one who was a strong nationalist). He simply put his walking stick in front of the cycling policeman one day, with the result that the latter went careering with his cycle down the bund. He got up and came to us, furious and menacing : he knew who we all were and he threatened us with dire consequences and with reporting the matter *at once* (he was on his way to his 'spree' at the *white club*) to his superiors—the District Magistrate and the Superintendent of Police. We asked him to do his worst and had a very hearty laugh over his discomfiture. Think of this man cycling into us, day in and day out, and sending us scurrying pell-mell so that we might not be run over by him—and he, a police officer !

He was as good as his word—and the European clique sent for our 'black' Principal, Rai Bahadur Banerji and the Magistrate, as President of the Governing Body of the College, ordered the Principal to 'suspend' Professor Chatterji from his duties until further orders. This was something which neither the President of the Governing Body nor the Principal himself could do—for Professor Chatterji was a member of the Provincial Education Service,—a gazetted officer,—and no action could be taken against him without the orders emanating from the Director of Public Instruction as agent of the Government of Bengal. Feelings ran high when the Principal communicated the 'suspension' order to Professor Chatterji next day. The entire body of college Professors lecturers and demonstrators took it as a gross insult and we determined to fight the question out —both with the Department and in the law courts. Some of the best lawyers of the local Bar were briefed (of course they rendered honorary service, they were our friends and the College teachers were held in high esteem throughout the town and the District)—the leader being Sudarshan Chakravarti, himself a brilliant M. A. (of Calcutta) and in high practice there. The entire student-body was 'shocked'

and thought of how to retaliate against this insult offered to the popular Professor. To cut a long story short, the matter dragged on for about 3 months, the English Director of Public Instruction came over and sided with the white clique (even the white missionaries of the town had joined in this infamous conspiracy) and confirmed the suspension order till the official enquiry would be over. Meanwhile the Executive Engineer under whose control the embankment was, Pundit Matadin Sukul, a staunch and fearless nationalist at heart, a graduate of Roorkee and a friend of Pundit Madan Mohan Malviya, who was naturally very intimate with us, caused to be put up a notice at several places of the embankment that all cycling and vehicular traffic on it was forbidden and trespassers would be prosecuted. This placed the white clique in rather a tight corner. The whole thing was enquired into by Mr. Monahan, the very impartial Commissioner of the Division (an Irishman he was), and after taking some evidence and interrogating some of us, the College Professors, he found the Anglo-Indian Police Officer guilty of grave indiscretion and exonerated Professor Chatterji of all charges and of any blame whatsoever. Professor Chatterji was re-instated, the entire white clique looked foolish and the Police-officer was sent away with a black mark to another distant station.

But matters were not to end here. The Principal's relations with us had cooled down: we thought he did not assert himself adequately, as our boss kow-towed to the white Executive Officials (they had proceeded so low as to induce one or two 'weak-kneed' Deputy Magistrates of questionable manners and still more questionable efficiency to bear false witness against Professor Chatterji), in order to keep on the safe side of the fence. Relations between the Executive and the Police on the one side and the College staff and students on the other got very much strained; and they were on the look-out for bringing the 'rebel' teachers and students to book as soon as any convenient loop-hole could be manufactured. This soon came. A circus party had been performing in the town—a mile away from the College area: there was some altercation between the managers of the Circus and a body of students and certain students were roughly handled by the Circus people. In retaliation, the boys were alleged to have marched in a body of 100 or 200 to the Circus with their hockey-sticks and beat the Circus men and damaged some

of their belongings. Information was laid before the Police and we prepared the Hostel students in particular, and the entire body of students also, for police search and interrogation. Some of the boys had bruises consequent on the fight and we spirited them away, giving them 'retrospective' leave from the Hostel. This was the spirit of Government College teachers of our temper thirty-five years ago ; we considered ourselves the natural guardians and protectors of our boys against police and executive *zulum* and harassment and we never thought of the probable consequences to ourselves and our prospects in service so long as we could discharge this fundamental duty of shielding our boys—'the blood of our blood and the flesh of our flesh'. Indeed they were as dear to us as our own brothers and sons and they reciprocated the sentiment.

Word came that the 'irate' District Magistrate with Police officials would himself come for an identification parade of the entire student-body in the College grounds on the day after next : they came and were received with 'boos' and 'jeers', of course behind the backs of the Professors. They behaved all right when we faced them but altered their behaviour when we had made room for the investigators. Nobody could be identified and the whole thing ended in a fiasco, with the European officials suffering another discomfiture.

The next thing that happened was very grave. The King-Emperor had come in person to open the Durbar at Delhi and 'Durbar Day' was being observed (12th December it was) in all civil stations in India with sports, illuminations and fetes. A combined Athletic Board was formed with representatives of the College staff on it : the two secretaries were one Mr. Casey, an assistant Police Superintendent and a young member of our staff, keen on sports, whom we had elected. Mr. Gasey showed the usual racial arrogance and sent chits to his colleague in the College as though he was a subordinate. I was consulted and I asked my colleague to send him an exact replica of his chit while addressing him. The white man could not do anything but was chafing and fretting and talked about it to the Principal, who after his sad experience over Professor Chatterji's affair, kept mum. Well, the day of the Durbar Day sports arrived : they were arranged in the College grounds, fenced with strong bamboo-poles for the occasion and there were besides other events a final tug-of-war between College students and Police ranks. What

was our surprise to see that, with the whole body of District officials and town gentry and College staff present, the Police constables (egged on evidently by this Mr. Casey) got out of hand directly they sensed they were losing the event and began to beat the boys. When I interfered, a police-man had the cheek to snatch away my walking-stick and another my watch! One or two other Professors had similar experiences. When the word was passed around that we were being molested, the students lost all control, wrenched the bamboo poles from their fixings and beat up the policemen, till several had to be carried to hospital and one of them subsequently died. A number of our students had also received cuts and bruises and we were careful to have them dressed and bandaged and hospital reports drawn up about them in anticipation of another exhibition of white 'zulum'. Well, the sports broke up in absolute disorder and the town was in ferment. The white officials were 'non-plussed' : if the Calcutta press got wind of these untoward happenings—specially of a fracas between Government College students and Government's Police, the officials would be brought to book—for the King-Emperor had come on a mission of pacification and a big surprise was launched by His Majesty when he announced *the repeal of the Partition of Bengal at the Durbar at Delhi!* So these whites took counsel and came to the Principal's house and met us of the College : they tried to fasten the blame on us but when they found me and one or two other Professors very firm and armed with evidence of the zulum and indiscipline of the police miscreants, they had so cool down, asked us 'to forgive and forget' and got an assurance from us and the local gentry that the matter should not go the press and no action would be taken against anybody. The incident was to be regarded as closed.

Well, the man of the police who succumbed to his injuries in hospital was entered as having died of 'cholera' and there the matter ended.

A report, however, had been sent of all these incidents by 'somebody' to the Dacca English newspaper of which the Editor was a friend of mine : this was reproduced in the *Amrita Bazar Patrika* of Calcutta and the entire game was exposed. The police tried their best to find out who had sent the report. It was myself. But the Police could not get a scent from anybody about it.

I must turn from the College to the town and the local gentry. The town of Rajshahi was spread over a big area. It was a long-stretching, straggling town, spreading along the river for about 4 miles, with a population in 1912 of say about 20,000. On one side was the river on which steamers from East Bengal stations proceeding to West Bengal and Bihar plied and there were also other river-craft, up-country boats, boats from Dacca and the neighbourhood carrying cargoes of mangoes from Maldah and Rajshahi and local fishermen's boats and passenger-boats and ferry-boats. Beyond the stretch of the river near my house a big *char-land* with crops and settlers, where we often crossed over for a pic-nic, and on the other side of the town was a big stretch of jungle and the ruins of an old indigo factory, with villages and some middling silk-factories run by Europeans who had succeeded the indigo-planters of the old days, after indigo was put out of market by the discovery of manufacture of artificial indigo by chemical processes in Germany. One-horsed contraptions called 'tom-tom' (fashioned somewhat after the 'ekkas' and 'tongas' of U.P. and Bihar) were the usual conveyances and they took 3 or even 4 passengers to long distances, to Puthia (where were the residences and *kutcheries* of the two wings of the celebrated Puthia zemindars) about 14 miles off, thence to Natore 30 miles off from Rajshahi town, where one could get connection with the Darjeeling Mail and other trains for Calcutta. Otherwise one had to proceed by steamer to Lalgola in Murshidabad district from Rajshahi and thence board the train for the Metropolis. These one-horse conveyances took you to other bigger villages with zemindar's houses or big markets and we often had outings and excursions to such places.

The 'settlement' operations (for recording after fresh enquiry and examination of land-records and titles) were on, sometime in 1915, and many of the higher officers (Deputy Collectors, Munsifs, Revenue Officers and Kanungoes, Asst. Settlement Officers) were my acquaintances and College chums and I remember to have visited them in their 'camps' in the interior, sometimes 50 miles from the town and enjoyed their lavish hospitality and got first-hand knowledge of the peasantry and land problems of the district.

The Dighapatia Raj was another family of zemindars of great munificence and renown with whom I became intimate. The Raja

(Pramada Nath Roy) was a man who carried himself like a noble man and who treated us with utmost cordiality when we visited him. For him I had a personal admiration because he came once every year to Rajshahi in great state, in a flotilla of boats and a steam-launch and entertained the European officials and the local gentry and the College boys. He was not of the servile brood of zemindars who waited on the white District officers like henchmen, but he mixed on superior terms, with these men, ranking only the Lt-Governor of the Province as standing higher, and entitled to receive from him special courtesies. With his younger brother I struck up relations of near friendships—and in a short while, I joined Kumar Sarat Kumar Roy, an M.A. in Physics and senior to me at the Presidency College. He conceived along with the renowned historical scholar and Bengali Literateur Akshoy Kumar Maitra, the renowned writer of the brochure on Siraj-ud-dowla in Bengali which blew up by quoting irrefutable evidence from contemporary sources the myth of the Black Hole Tragedy, and Rama Prasad Chanda, then only a school-teacher at the Collegiate School attached to the Government College, but one who by sheer personal talent and indefatigable industry in research rose high in the Department of Archaeology and published many valuable researches in ancient history the idea of collecting the 'stones' and the old manuscripts of *Varendra Bhumi* and founding a Research Society to be called the *Varendra Research Society*. Later on was started on a permanent financial basis (with subvention from the Bengal Government) the Varendra Society's Museum, housed in a beautiful building with a guest-house and a big well-laid compound and gardens, with a fine collection of historical and archaeological and numismatical literature. This venture was also joined by my friend and colleague Professor Ghulam Yazdani and by Professor Santosh Chatterji.

We often made excursions to distant village areas (specially those which were under the Dighapatia zemindary) from where news had been received of the existence of old stone images, in all manner of conveyances—bullock-carts, hackney-carriages and elephants. I enjoyed these rough-and-tumble adventures very much : they suited my temper and we often came away, after a successful hunt, with a booty of stone images. Sometimes the local ignorant people tried to obstruct us : we managed to overcome their prejudices and

meet their objections (which were largely religious since occasionally these images, besmeared with a tattoo of vermillion and sandal-paste and placed under banyan trees were worshipped by the village folk) and get hold of the images, placed them on our elephant's back and after some rest in one of the zemindary *kutcheries*, returned to the town. There was a hunt for old 'coins' and 'manuscripts' also. Thus began the foundation of the Varendra Research Society and Museum.

My friend Professor Yazdani was a student of St. Stephen's College, Delhi where he read with C. F. Andrews, who gave up his holy orders subsequently, joined Tagore in Santi-Niketan and became a link between Gandhiji and Tagore, as also between the Congress and the official 'bloc' here and in Great Britain. Yazdani's was from a very ancient Muslim family of Delhi and he had a fine 'nose' for research. He wrote a thesis on *Jahanara*, (I collaborated in the finishing and the embellishment after he had collected the historical materials from old sources and put them in written form) which earned the Griffith Memorial Prize of Calcutta University. He had in his home-chest a fine collection of illustrated manuscripts, fine specimens of Muslim Calligraphy—one such manuscript of the *Ramayana*, he sold for a very high price to one of the Feudatory Chiefs. Yazdani was a typical Muslim from the real old Muslim aristocracy and preferred to keep company with men like us. In fact, his *bon homie*, his cultured manner, his independence and integrity of character, his overpowering sweetness of disposition and large-hearted charity and charitableness were admirable. He never could make both ends meet with the two hundred or two hundred and fifty rupees he received as salary per month and lived a grass-widower's life near us, for it would be very expensive for him to get his wife and child from Delhi to live with him. They were used to much higher standards than those of the surrounding local Muslim houses. Yazdani was very popular with all the student-body and also with the townspeople. We used to be inseparable friends and companions and we dined together at my place and at his bachelor's establishment and my boy Benoyendra used to be a great favourite with him and often ate, as a youngster of two or three years, out of his hands.

It was through Yazdani that I got acquainted with C.F. Andrews,

who later on, became one of my best friends and almost like an elder brother. It was like this. When Rabindranath had been awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1913, there were jubilations all over Bengal and Rajshahi also celebrated the event. We of the College and prominent townsmen led by Akshoy Kumar Maitra joined in a meeting at the College Common Room Hall and read papers on Rabindranath and offered him our felicitations. I was one of the speakers and as I had been a fervent reader and lover of Tagore since 1902, my speech was appreciated by many. Shortly after, I wrote a paper in English—a short thesis—on Tagore and his writings—and Yazdani, charmed with it, sent it on to C.F. Andrews at Delhi. Andrews sent it on to Sj. Ramananda Chatterji for publication in the Modern Review. It was not published then, as the paper had more than its necessary reserve of articles and as I was told by Sj. Chatterji when I saw him in Calcutta that the paper would be published but he could not specify the time, I took the paper away.\* But the acquaintance thus began continued and brother Andrews often wrote to me and I wrote back—a series of very chitchatty letters, some of which I wrote during a summer recess when I was at my village home in Vikrampur and in which I had given Andrews some ideas of my life during the vacation in my leafy home of cottages with mango-blossoms and the call of cuckoos all round and incidentally told him of the daring ‘viking’ exploits of our ancestors in that riverine area of constant floods and fights against nature and the pirates and the Dutch, French and Portuguese raiders of the 17th and 18th century—and Andrews who was very friendly with the then Viceroy, Lord Hardinge, had shown some of those letters to him and Andrews wrote to me to say the Viceroy had remarked ‘your friend must be a poet’.

Another friend and colleague whom I helped in finishing his archaeological and historical essays was Professor Radha Govinda Basak at Rajshahi, who some years ago retired from the Presidency College: he also was one of the Varendra Research group at Rajshahi. Rajshahi was, in fact, my training ground as a nationalist

\* It was published in the Rajshahi College Magazine and later on ‘incorporated’ by my permission into a small volume on the History of Bengali Literature written by my pupil Kumud Nath Das, which is now an approved University text-book for the B. A. degree of Calcutta.

worker—my jumping-off ground, I may say—for I learnt the art of managing and controlling large masses there by my experience of controlling and getting the ear and loyal following of one thousand cultivated College young men of all communities and varieties of temper: it was also the training-ground of researchers like Ramaprasad Chanda, Yazdani, Radha Govinda Basak—the grand old stager Akshoy Kumar Maitra leading and guiding and Kumar Sarat Kumar Roy giving encouragement and helping with funds in the matter of printing and publication.

Two other public events in which I took some share at Rajshahi deserve special mention. One was the session of the Bengali Literary Conference held at Rajshahi with Maharaja Jagadindra Nath Roy of Natore as Chairman of the Reception Committee and Sj. Pramatha Chaudhury—‘Birbal’ of *Sabuj-Patra* fame—as President. The session was a splendid success—some really excellent papers were read, of which far and away the most learned was by our friend and colleague Siva Prasad Bhattacharya (I believe the essay was on *Alankara*), a descendant of a family of learned Sanskritists of Bhatpara and another was, I believe, by Rama Prasad Chanda. The Maharaja of Natore gave a most cultured address in flowing and resonant Bengali in which he was a master and Pramatha Chaudhury’s address was just what we expected from him—a ‘chiaroscuro’ of lights and shadows, elegant, just a bit flavoured with cynicism and lit up in places with coruscations that would do honour to Anatole France or G. B. Shaw!

Another was the formal opening of the Varendra Research Society’s Museum by Lord Carmichael. The noble Lord produced an excellent impression by his genial and refined personality and our grand old man, Akshoy Kumar Maitra, figured prominently here as he had figured in the Literary Conference.

Among College events, the staging of D. L. Roy’s *Mewar Patan*—(The Fall of Mewar) by our pupils somewhere in 1910 was a great event—marking a stage in the evolution of the College boys’ national consciousness and the development of their histrionic abilities! In fact my seven and a half years’ life at Rajshahi was so full, so rich, so packed with events that I could fill a volume with my recollections. I had become so much identified with the joys and sorrows of the town that the Varendra Samaj of Rajshahi adopted me as one of

them (though I was a *Rahri* Brahmin from East Bengal)—so much so, that at the *rice-initiation* ceremony of one of my boys, when cover was laid for 250 people, the cooking was done by an aristocratic lady of the place—the wife of a Varendra zemindar friend and neighbour !

Life at Rajshahi (extending over  $7\frac{1}{2}$  years) was indeed very delightful—full of excursions, social intercourse, adventure, ‘fights’ and varied study. Besides college debates and literary societies and socials organised by students—we of the College had our private symposiums, where all manner of things, philosophy, politics, the progress of the World War No. I, Literature, Science, History, Archaeology, social problems—were discussed, arguments *pro* and *con* were bandied about with much of light but not much of heat—and it is certain that we were moulded and shaped unconsciously by all these intellectual gymnastics. We had our ‘special’ boat excursions, our specially organised pic-nics and outings, our reciprocal social engagements. Then the College Magazine gave us scope ; I believe my first article ‘Culture and Anarchy—a new application’—published in this Magazine as far back as 1910 has lost none of its charm even to-day and would bear reprinting. These papers were often read in the open meetings, discussed and criticised and then printed. Professor Krishna Chandra Bhattacharya had read a paper on the ‘Psychological Aspects of Revolutionary Terrorism’ in the College Hall—a very learned paper which did not condemn the terroristic or revolutionary exhibitions of young Bengal forthright for it was meant not to condemn or praise but to give a ‘philosophic’ analysis and synthesis of the Revolutionary frame of mind. This was reported by the Intelligence Branch and the paper went up to the higher authorities for examination. I believe the paper was written in such a form, so well-guarded and academic in phrasing and expression that they could not find anything ‘objectionable’. But so far as I recollect at this distance of time, the learned philosopher had meant a defence of Physical Force Revolution in his thesis !

Our relations with Principal Banerji got smoother after the fight with white officialdom in which we had won and he was really a nice man, full of courtesy and lavish in hospitality, and with real ability of organisation. I do not know of any other Bengali Principal in Government employ who had developed a College from very small

beginnings into a University-like consummation, with vitality coursing through its veins. He dominated the life of the District for years, being non-official Chairman of the District Board and the City Municipality and he made a lot of money by his books and by successful speculation in shares in tea and other things. He purchased a small zemindary also and built no less than a dozen pucca houses in the town, but his successors have not been lucky to preserve their ancestor's accumulations. Professor Raj Mohan Sen was another gentleman, 'gentle' in all the connotations of the word, friendly with all, a man of the utmost honesty of manner and purpose—who had only one passion—the bringing up of his boy Bhupati—in which he eminently succeeded, for Bhupati not only distinguished himself here as a mathematical scholar but kept it up at Cambridge where he became Wrangler and Smith Prizeman, came back as Professor of Mathematics in the Presidency College from England and rose to be Principal, in which capacity, his urbanity and gentleness charmed all who came into his sphere. Professor Sen had been a friend of my father when the latter was an assistant about six decades ago in the office of G. Bellett, another fine mathematical scholar and Divisional Inspector of Schools. Professor Sen has continued to treat me and my family with very great cordiality. He was my mentor and adviser often in my troubles with Principal Banerji at Rajshahi—for I was touchy and extrasensitive and fiercely independent and often had differences with him on questions of discipline or on circulars issued by him or about the management of socials and games. And games remind me of my experience of Berhampore College, of Principal E. M. Wheeler and of the munificent Maharaja Manindra Chandra Nandy, the life and soul of the College, a nobleman who practically gave away his all in charities, in the encouragement of swadeshi manufactures and industries and banking and what not. I am also reminded of the splendid hospitality we enjoyed at Berhampore when more than once Professor Yazdani and myself led our College football team to play a friendly game with the Barhampore College team. Principal Wheeler was connected by birth with Michael Madhusudan Dutt and he was a most brilliant scholar and [Professor—in fact Anglo-Indian-dom in Bengal has hardly produced his equal through the last two centuries—and as Principal he raised Berhampore College to a height of achievement

never to be surpassed. In later life, when he had not much of health and vigour left, he worked assiduously for the spread of the co-operative movement throughout the District and everybody from the District officer downwards looked up to him for advice and direction in these nation-making activities. I got on very well with him and at my request, he himself came over once to Rajshahi with his College team for a friendly game and he produced such an impression all round by his abounding vitality and good humour that I remember it even to-day.

In December 1916, the Department suddenly ordered my transfer to the Presidency College. For me and many of my colleagues and most of my pupils and for many of the townsmen, it was a severe wrench—this compulsory leaving behind the field of my labour in many directions, this breaking away from Rajshahi society—but there was no remedy for it. Early in January, I left with family for Calcutta and rejoined the Presidency College after practically eight years.

The Presidency College had visibly changed meanwhile. The young Mr. Wordsworth, my contemporary and colleague of 1907, was now Principal and one Mr. Sterling, an Englishman of hardly any real scholarship who might have been a success as a recruiting-sergeant or Police or Executive Officer—but, in my view, quite unfit for a serious educational job, was Head of the English Department. Some of my old colleagues were there and some of my old Professors also—M. Ghosh, Sarada Prasanna Das, D. N. Mallik, J. N. Das Gupta and P. C. Ray. My old chum Prafulla Chandra Ghosh was there and that was a great encouragement. Meanwhile some young people had joined, whom I found to be unabashed pedants, rather ‘over-conscious’, and at the same time very servile to their English seniors. These things I could hardly stomach—and my first reception by the new Principal rather chilled me. He made a pretence of not recognising me at all as his old colleague (we had taught the same book of Ruskin’s in different sections of the College 10 years ago) and when I reminded him of our old association, it appeared he did not relish it much. The man had been hoisted over the heads of the ‘native’ senior Professors, many of them very able and with European degrees—and his crown evidently did not sit tightly on his head. The Head of my Department—Professor Sterling—I found most

interfering—it was a question of incompatibility at first sight. I did not like his free-and-easy ways of hectoring and advising me on details of my work in tutorials and other things, as if I was a green-horn, and I had to tell him I was an 'old boy' of the College and had been Professor there ten years ago, knew all its ins and outs—and Mr. Sterling did not like my independence and jauntiness. The fact is, 8 years in Rajshahi, where we had built up a really national College with Freedom as the be-all and end-all of all College pursuits and studies, where inside the College there was not a single 'white' fly—had bred in me a temper totally unsuited to the compromising spirit, the bland acceptance of inferior status by the majority of Professors.

I went to my lectures, caring nothing about the English Head or the English Principal. It was my old College and it was my own preserve—my 'alma mater' where I had learnt many a lesson and fought many a fight and where I carried myself so independently even 8 years back—and I took the boys into my confidence and was immediately and widely popular. I occasionally taught Rabindranath in the classes—in Bengali—(he was not part of the English text anywhere yet) and asked the sprinkling of Parsee and Anglo-Indian boys to bear with me. They could not follow a single syllable either of Rabindranath's Bengali poetry or my reading or elucidation. The world war was on and I set my boys to write essays as to the propriety or otherwise of helping the British in this war by joining as combatants, or the racial bar in India, or the poverty-problem, or the defects of the University system.

On one occasion, I had the original experience of being asked 'to run up to my class' by the office steward, supposed to be the Principal's Head Assistant and adviser. Of course, I did not take it lying down—and practically 'made a scene' in the Professors' common room when I came back from the lecture and told everybody I was going to the Principal *at once* and meant to ask him if his steward (a mere office assistant) had been made 'overseer' of college Professors. It transpired that some of the Professors had been found to be habitual 'slackers' and to remedy this, big clocks had been set up over the first and second floor landings and it was made a rule that the interval between finishing one lecture and starting another should not exceed 7 minutes : many still were 'slack'

and the steward was in the habit of giving them friendly hints as to the time and I was asked not to take the matter so seriously. Well, I stuck to my guns—for here was involved a big principle of prestige of the entire body of teachers—and at last some of the senior men assured me they would approach the Principal next day and apprise him of the situation. They expected little but I know strong and just action must bear results and young Principal Wordsworth had to come to us in the Professors' room and apologise for the unseemly conduct of his steward.

I was on the point of being taken in as a Post-Graduate Lecturer by Sir Asutosh in addition to my duties, when the conspiracy hatched between the white Principal and the white Head of the English section came to a head. My friend Professor Rabindra N. Ghosh had thrown up his appointment as Senior Professor of English in the Government College at Krishnagar, where he had been transferred, more or less as a penal measure, after the unseemly 'Oaten' affair in 1916—and Principal Gilchrist of Krishnagar wanted a man of ability and academic honours comparable to Ghosh's to replace him, and so my transfer had been arranged between the Educational Director and the Principal and I was to have a second move only after 7 months! I met Professor Sterling and gave him a bit of my mind, straight from the shoulder and he seemed to wince: I made him go to the Principal to intercede and prevent my transfer (I knew it was their joint doing—but I made him go, that was something) and he came back to say the orders were final. Evidently he had reported the strong words I had uttered and they were confirmed in their resolve to shove me off. Was I not disturbing the sweet 'placidity' of the College waters? Would not the College return to 'normalcy' after I left?

The only silver lining to the clouds and mists of my 7 months' tenure of office again in my old College was my association with my old Professor M. Ghosh and chum Prafulla Ghosh and with Professor P. C. Ray, who was uniformly loving and kind. Professor Monmohan Ghosh told me in confidence that nothing could be done to these white bunglers for the present and advised me to let superfluous steam in my mental make-up off by '*writing it out*' (his own expression which I still recollect after a lapse of about 30 years). Prafulla Ghosh was very cordial and sympathetic but what could he

do? With P. C. Roy I had many exchanges of confidence and we discussed Literature and English poetry often when together we were 'invigilating' in class or University examinations in the College. The learned Professor, the idol and example of teachers and students for a generation, retired in 1917 and it was my privilege to be approached by the new and old Science boys (of the M.A. and M.Sc. classes) for writing, in their behalf, the valedictory address. I have been told that the brief address, punctuated with high and deserved praise of the savant, was widely appreciated by the audience, by the Science men and students assembled and by Sir P. C. Ray himself. The thing is, I had written it straight out of my heart and my 'hero-worship', never bordering on servility or loss of my individual point of view, expressed itself directly—for I had been a lover and admirer of P. C. Ray ever since I met him in the flesh in 1902!

I used to visit Sir Asutosh Mookerjee occasionally and I told him one evening of the sudden transfer to Krishnagar which was due to the machinations of the 'English clique', and I remember how for over one hour he gave me solace and comfort and asked me to rely on Providence for 'what seems to be an evil today turns out to be a blessing to-morrow'. Words very truly said by one of the greatest men of Bengal—which have certainly come true—for if I had not been kicked about from place to place by these white men, if I had not been a victim of their racial arrogance and of unjust treatment, I might not have come out, as I did in 1921, for the country's service—a bigger and a much more comprehensive cause than serving as a Presidency College Professor in these later degenerate days and retiring on a pension with the doubtful accretion of a motor-car and a bank-balance—which are the ultimate purpose of some College teachers today!

I had made the acquaintance of C. R. Das also about this time. It was in 1917 that he had delivered a fine address in Bengali at the Provincial Political Conference held in Bhowanipore, in which for the first time I found a new approach to Bengal's problems and a new orientation of political method. Chittaranjan Das hailed from Vikrampur and that was an additional reason of my attraction for him. I visited him once in his Bhowanipore home (now the Chittaranjan Seva-Sadan, for this prince of sacrificers left nothing for his family except, I have been told, a bare pittance for his saintly spouse Sjta. Basanti Devi).

I had just half-an-hour's conversation with him and we discussed among other things the feasibility of a College at Vikrampur. The area had as many as forty High Schools, from which over 500 boys passed out every year and with these feeder schools, there would be no dearth of students. A College had been started several years ago by one of the Roys of Bhagyakul in the subdivisional town, but the College owing to mismanagement and lack of support from the officials and Bar of the Munshiganj subdivisional town did not prosper and had to be closed down. I found Chittaranjan not very enthusiastic : evidently his thoughts were already turning to problems of the masses, their education, their lack of any economic and political consciousness, the apathy of the townspeople and English-educated classes towards them, and urgent village problems ; and he did not think much of these Colleges under the official, outmoded system, which really had been responsible for creating a wide gulf between the classes and the masses, with tragic results.

I had also made a trip to Santi-Niketan earlier about 1912 and met there several of my old acquaintances, amongst them the late lamented Ajit Chakravarti, who fell under Rabindranath's spell after entering College, left his studies at the B.A. stage without taking a degree and joined Santi-Niketan, which was then a smallish place with, I believe, not more than a dozen workers and teachers, one of the most enthusiastic being Santosh Kumar Majumdar, one of the nicest men that I ever met and one of Tagore's early pupils and first workers : he also, alas ! died young, much to the loss of Santi-Niketan and the cause it had already stood for. I was then Professor at Rajshahi College and though I found real welcome from most of Rabindranath's co-workers, I came across just a few who thought me, a government College teacher rather out of the pale and were a bit stand-offish. Rabindranath was there ; I saw him taking his morning walk in the open grounds but I was too shy to encroach upon his leisure. I believe I met also Kshiti Mohan Sen, another Vikrampur man, who had had a fine Sanskritic training at Benaras and had joined the educational experiment and also Pandit Vidhu Sekhar Shastri. I talked with the boys and found them, some at least, very alert but a little bit too 'cocksure'. I am not quite sure if C. F. Andrews was there yet. I found that the young boys had rather a bit of excessive freedom and went about

mostly according to their boyish impulses' and inclinations—a few climbing the trees and dangling their legs, when the teacher was giving lessons under the shade. This rather jarred on me. I still believe Santi-Niketan was rather slack in these matters and the result has not always been satisfying—for if the truth must be told, while the teachers of various departments at Santi-Niketan have led very useful lives and made their mark in research, in art, in music, in the cultivation of Bengali language and Literature and in Oriental Scholarship, the output of boys of outstanding ability has not been so marked ; and today, the Arts and Crafts section is the most successful wing, under the inspiring lead of Nanda Lal Bose, the most unassuming artist that I have ever met anywhere, thoroughly devoted to his art and his teaching of art, absolutely impervious to other worldly considerations, with a smile always hovering on his lips.

In 1917, I remember to have visited the poet at his Jorasanko residence and to have on certain occasions joined the group listening to his written discourses. Before this, I had met Sudhindranath Tagore at Giridhi and struck up an intimacy with him—a soul-intimacy for we agreed on many fundamental issues of life and him also I occasionally met—he was the pink of courtesy and a most unassuming gentleman : his son Soumyendra Nath was then a mere stripling ; also I had met Dinendra Nath Tagore, the musician.

It was during this period that I studied the works of Neitzsche and was impressed by his vigour of mind and daring. I had also some contacts with the Bangiya Sahitya Parishad and its learned members. The refreshing lectures delivered by Professor Patric Geddes on certain aspects of civilisation and its development had also made a deep impression on me. I met Brojendra Nath Seal but had not the opportunity of making any intimate acquaintance with the savant. I remember to have been complimented by him on the only occasion I went up to see him and talked for an hour with him, on the possession of 'a breezy mind' which he opined might be useful to the Post-Graduate Department if I was taken in there.

However, my Calcutta life which was just beginning to spread itself amongst cultured and patriotic circles—suddenly was

interrupted—by my transfer to Krishnagar.\* My father had just retired from service and joined me with my mother at Calcutta and the whole family was shifted to my new place.

Krishnagar is the Headquarters of the Nadia District and is a place of historic fame, having been the seat of the Maharajas of Nadia-Krishnagar for several hundred years, who were patrons of Sanskrit learning, of the new-budding Bengali Language and Literature (it was in their court that Bharat Chandra Roy Gunakar composed his *Annada-Mangal Kavya*, a classic of old Bengali poetry), of art and music, and whose charities and munificence were by-words in Bengal of the 18th and 19th centuries. The dialect of Krishnagar and Santipur (a neighbouring place, famed as a place of culture and as a weaving-centre as famous in the old days as Dacca and Chandernagar) by virtue of its inherent sweetness and of the patronage it received, became the literary language of Bengal. A few miles away from Krishnagar is Fulia, the village where the immortal

\*I should not forget to mention some of the bright students whom I had the privilege of teaching in the Presidency College in 1917. Muhammad Hassan, now Vice-Chancellor of the University of Dacca, Phani Bhushan Chakravarti recently elevated to a High Court Judgeship from the Advocates' side of the High Court Bar, B. B. Roy who was associate Editor of the 'Statesman' and for long years a very brilliant Professor of English at the Scottish Church College and who unfortunately is no more, Nirmal Chandra Bhattacharyya, a distinguished Professor of Economics at the Scottish Church College and at the Calcutta University Post-Graduate Department, H. L. Dey, Head of the Department of Economics at Dacca University and now a member of the Tariff Board of the Government of India—were among these. Of my students at Rajshahi, those who have attained distinction as scholars are Professor Tripurari Chakravarti, a very bright and popular member of the History Department of Calcutta University, Professor Kalika Ranjan Kanungo of Dacca University, who had made a big reputation by his valuable works on Sher Shah and other Islamic subjects. The greatest political sufferers among my old pupils of Rajshahi College have been three—one a Hindu, Asutosh Lahiri who for alleged participation in revolutionary activity was sentenced to 10 years' transportation with hard labour to the Andamans and became a chum of Veer Savarkar and is now General Secretary of the All-India Hindu Mahasabha, the other, a nationalist Muslim leader Asrafuddin Ahmed Choudhury, a prominent leader of the 'Forward Bloc' and Satya Priya Banerjee, son of the respected Principal Kumudini Kanta Banerji under whom I worked at Rajshahi College—also a 'Forward Bloc' man and now an M.L.A. (Central). Dhiren Ghatak, (who was interned at Kutubdia char) I have already mentioned.

poet of Bengal, Krittivas, the composer of the Bengali version of the Sanskrit Valmiki Ramayana was born. It was he who along with Kasidas, the composer of the Bengali version of the Mahabharata has charmed millions of Bengal's people, from prince to peasant—and kept them in the paths of tender filial duty and gentle piety for centuries. Even sixty years ago, Krishnagar and Navadwip—the holy city of the Bengal Vaishnavites, sanctified by the religious preachings of Sri Chaitanya and his apostles and their exemplary lives of *prema* and self-abnegation in the highest—(which, five centuries ago, irrigated the dry souls of millions in Bengal, Assam and Orissa thirsting for a life-philosophy and religious theory and practice freed from the dead-weight of formalism and rigid and lifeless custom and from the cruelties of animal sacrifice and the social injustices perpetrated on large masses of people by the rigours of caste and 'don't-touch-isms' which lay like an oppressive nightmare on followers of the ancient ways)—were health-resorts, centres of trade and business, with the Ganges and the Kharia rivers flowing by with their pellucid waters. But when I went to Krishnagar in 1917, I found it a rather dingy and dirty old-world city of men without hope and ambition and of women without education and freedom. The Kharia river flowing just by my house was running gradually dry and all the belated attempts of the Irrigation Department to keep it flowing for 12 months of the year and cleaning up of the weeds with which the river was being fast choked were hardly of any avail. The College was housed in a very nice old building with porticoes in the Greek style and with a very large compound, in part of which the Scotch Principal Mr. R. N. Gilchrist, an Economics man, was living with his wife. There was about the town and the College and the Courts and the local markets and the Roman Catholic and Protestant Churches and Missions and Schools—an air of *malaise*, of lost enthusiasms, of rot and rust and I did not feel quite happy with my first impressions.

The College had about 300 boys on its rolls and was affiliated in Honours in English, Mathematics and Sanskrit and also in pass B. Sc. : there was a hostel for boys, some little distance away—a rather poor and dingy affair, where the meals were poor—and the health of the boys also far from satisfactory. It was a malarial place—the town of Krishnagar : the best of it was the confectionery

for which Krishnagar had always been famous and which was still of a high degree of excellence—and a group of ‘intellectuals’, not over half-a dozen picked and older men (but of them later)—and the scion of the Krishnagar Raj—Maharaja Khaunish Chandra Roy, who was a member of the College Governing Body—the last of a fast-disappearing race of noblemen—blue-blooded and princely in manner—and practically the last of his line who impressed himself on Nadia and the entire Province by his generosity of mind and clean courtesy. The Bar, with a few honourable exceptions, appeared rather undistinguished and lifeless. My colleagues were also not mostly of the type I had at Rajshahi and the Presidency College—there were besides my two rather bright and self-respecting colleagues on the English side (I was Head of the English Department), only two or three men in the Physics and Chemistry sections who might pass for ‘nice’. One or two were plain ‘eccentrics’, a few ‘colourless’, and a few, mere hangers-on of the European boss—an unlicked man, suffering from a touch of brain as regards his innate superiority to all of us because he was a white man and a member of the ruling race.

As was inevitable, after some time the clash and conflict between myself and the half-a-dozen Professors that had some degree of independence and the white Principal began. I have always found that the arrogance and *zubberdusti* of the white men in India are not ingrained in their nature, speaking dispassionately of the average—but they are encouraged and egged on by slavish, opportunist and cowardly self-seekers amongst ourselves. If in a body of 50 or 20 or 100 ‘natives’, a few ‘salaam’ the white superior and behave like his servants and *chaprasis*, the self-love of the latter is bound to take exaggerated forms, and he thinks of others who are less tractable as out of the normal, as rebels and peace-breakers and iconoclasts. And he takes every opportunity of wounding them and harming them—in harming them in Government departments, ‘confidential reports’ being a formidable weapon in the hands of the superior officers against their subordinates. As a College teacher, I had always taken my stand on the fundamental principle based on reason and fact that all members of the staff, in spite of Government-imposed difference in status and salary, were colleagues and equals—doing the same kind of work, teaching and guiding students in the paths

of goodness and right conduct and devotion to learning—and by virtue of the nature of work and because of the sanctity and dignity of the vocation to which they had dedicated themselves, never thinking of more remunerative jobs and professions—(members of the higher administrative and judicial services and successful advocates and barristers, doctors and engineers earned much more money than a College teacher even of the highest calibre) there should not be any underhand intriguing, any opportunist tactics, any uncalled-for supineness or tricksiness in this fraternity. But as soon as a vocation is organised into a departmental service, with higher and lower grades, and chances of promotion are made dependent not so much on the quality of the work (which is judged generally with correctness by learners) and the reputation earned by the teacher on the score of personal qualities of initiative and devotion to the students' cause, as on the personal relations between the administrative Head of the College and his co-workers and the secret reports forwarded by him to the Head of the Provincial Education Department, the entire moral basis of the status and privilege of the teacher is undermined—and inefficient toadies and third-rate parasites unpopular with the students, who would have been 'cashiered' from any people's institution, are pushed up; and I have known of several cases where men of very low calibre—even eccentrics and oddities—have been elevated to the Principalship of our Government Colleges. Another way of advancement has been the supplying of 'information', mostly garbled and untruthful, to the Intelligence Department against patriotic colleagues and pupils. The presence of even one single 'informer' of this type on the staff—and these men are also the 'hangers-on', the loyal lieutenants of the white Principals, is enough to poison the atmosphere of any educational centre. Krishnagar suffered from such poisonous infection.

Very soon with the help of some of my pupils—prominent among them were two brothers who have taken a big part in the national movement since 1921 and are still in the frontrank of workers, lecturing, agitating and suffering—Bejoy Lal Chatterji and Mihir Lal Chatterji—besides a few of my 4th year Honours students in English led by Topogopal Mukherji who is now a Deputy Post-master-General—I could organise, with the active assistance of my colleagues

on the English staff—my old friend Rampada Majumdar and Narendra Nath Chatterji and the unostentatious Ramendra Nath Ghosh (Physics) and the very shy and modest Devendra Nath Sen (History)—a Bengali Literary Union in the College. This Union was doubly useful for our purpose. It rallied the staff and students and it opened the doors of the College to talented and independent townsmen, so that there was a breathing of fresh air in the stifled atmosphere of the College. I remember to have inaugurated the Union with an impromptu address in Bengali which was liked by everybody present, for it was distinctly political in flavour and in implication. I remember to have concluded with D. L. Roy's famous poetic line : which in English would be something like this :—

'The country has gone out of our hands—for that I will not grieve—so long as you my brothers will strive to be men again.'

Meanwhile, we had meetings of our English Literary Union, where I began openly to speak in the highest terms of Gandhiji who had already made history in Champaran and to tell our boys that we had nothing new to learn from the foreigner, but must unlearn a lot of what we had learnt from him. Principal Gilchrist used to be present at these meetings and it must have been a hard pill for him to swallow. But the speaker was one of the senior Professors and Head of the most important—the English section, popular with the students and popular with the townsmen. So he cooked his spleen and as I could realise later, tarred me with his brush in his confidential reports to the Director—now W. C. Wordsworth, who as Principal of the Presidency College had got me out of his preserve and shoved me on to Mr. Gilchrist !

We organised the first Krittivas Memorial function at Fulia—and with a big following of students and by the efforts of our own town literary coterie and myself and a few College Professors, made of it a big success—Sj. Jatindra Mohan Sinha and Sj. Jatindra Nath Sen\* (Deputy Magistrate and District Engineer) being in a position by virtue of their official standing in the District to be very useful. From that day (it was in 1918 that our function took place) there

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\*The former had an established literary reputation, whose novel *Dhruba Tara* (The Pole Star) and book of sketches *Orissa Chitra* (Vignettes of Orissa life) are well-known.

has been an annual function at Fulia in memory of poet Krittivas, though the response from the District and the Province is not so good as it ought to be. There is now a memorial stone with an inscription of verses in honour of the poet, a well and a middle English School on the grounds where the yearly festival is held. I had occasion to pay a private visit to the place only last year with a friend and found the well very dirty and littered with refuse of all sorts and the school also not in very good condition. This shows the apathy of our countrymen and of the local officials (all Indians and Bengalis for the matter of that now) towards good causes. We organised outings by boat to Navadwip, during seasons of festivals when *Kirtan* parties used to come and regale large audiences with their special styles of music, from various parts—Burdwan, Birbhum, Bankura—when accompanied by my aged father and myself, parties of students spent a day and an evening on a pilgrimage, tasting of the joys of the open river and of the sweetness of *Kirtan* songs at the holy city: we scoured the countryside near about and had our picnics. We had literary debates and discussions, musical soirees, games and sports, social service activities like nursing and helping the cremation of poor people. In these latter activities, Professor Ramendra Nath Ghosh was to us a pillar of strength. He was a true servant of the poor, and never spared himself in their service—laying all pride aside and going about the town, collecting funds for their good, in the spirit of a true and devout Vaishnava. In these matters, the most enthusiastic was my pupil Tarak Das Banerji, who since 1921 has been another of our front-rank political workers, working in the open, working ‘underground’, and has been a patient sufferer at the altar of the Motherland. I flatter myself all these efforts were not fruitless—they bore fruit quickly, for I left Krishnagar College in June 1919, having been transferred to Chittagong by the white official clique—and as soon as the call came from Mahatma Gandhi and Congress in 1921, many of my old pupils came out, suspended or altogether stopped their careers at College, and did a lot of work throughout the District and carried the new gospel to the far-off villages, where a malaria-stricken, devitalised and demoralised peasantry were being ground down under the wheels of a land-system, outmoded and pernicious in its results to-day—called the *utbandi* under which the tiller had no

occupancy rights and could be ousted at will from his plot or plots. This movement filled the countryside of Nadia also with new hopes and ambitions, set *charkas* spinning, looms weaving, launched a campaign against drink and drugs, started several national schools ; and the leading spirits were my old pupils—Bejoy Lal Chatterji, Tarak Das Banerji and a host of others.

Life outside the College was for me quite delightful at Krishnagar but soon the College life began to be distasteful, worrying and annoying. The conflict with Principal Gilchrist was fast taking shape—I and our 'set' found it difficult to carry on under his dictatorial ways (for instance, the College *chaprasis* sat still and never recognised us, the Indian College Staff, even by a nod when we passed on to our rooms, the College office was hardly helpful—the Principal had one of our colleagues posted there to do his work and keep us at bay—the College games were run by another colleague whose only idea was to flatter the complacency of the Principal and to pay respects to his wife. We had never been introduced to the lady and never cared to recognise her. How could we, she was a total stranger living in her 'ivory tower' inside the College an exclusive and isolated life ? There were constant 'breezes' in the College Council of Professors presided over by the Principal—and on one occasion, myself and one or two colleagues had to tell the Principal that we had no further taste for working with him, and would welcome a speedy transfer.

It was a position of fighting ; and men like me became all the more unsure because of the hopeless toadyism of one or two very senior lawyer members of the College Governing Body, who openly *salaamed* the European Principal in our social meets (poor old gentlemen of the old loyalist days which were fast coming to a close,—for many of us had *ended* in the glorious year of the first Revolution of 1905-06). Anyway relief came in the shape of a transfer-order for me to Chittagong. Mr. Gilchrist could not conceal his triumph and broke the news to me in a spirit of great 'glee'. I retaliated by telling him on the spot that I had visited Chittagong only a few months back—"it was the most romantic place in Bengal —flanked by the seas and overlooked by hills"—and I would be delighted to be there. Besides, 'the Principal was a senior Bengali friend and I would be the second man there—so I considered the

transfer a great blessing !' This apparently cooled him and I left for Chittagong in June 1919, after 2 years at Krishnagar.

I had, in conjunction with Professors D. N. Sen, and R. N. Ghosh done some work in the interests of girls' education in Krishnagar. We were instrumental in converting a local M. E. School to High School status and this school is now a very flourishing Girls' School, under the name of the Carmichael Girls' H. E. School. The best thing in my Krishnagar life was the fact that several old and retired gentlemen—Engineers, Deputy Magistrates, Sub-Judges—who cultivated the society of my respected father were very close to me also. We often kept company and I told them of my troubles at the College and they were helpful with advice. My father always encouraged me and he said 'Never give in and for God's sake, do not resign : fight these white fellows from inside' ! and when there was any correspondence that passed between the hostile Principal and myself, my father would look into the files, read my replies carefully and suggest improvements.

Shortly before I left Krishnagar, I made the acquaintance of Dilip Kumar Roy, the versatile writer and musical expert, who later travelled widely in Europe and met some of the leading intellectuals and musicians of Europe and published his talks with and impressions of them, besides writing many books of fiction and books on the theory and practice of Indian Music—one of the foremost disciples of Sri Aurobindo—and the only son of the famous Dwijendra Lal Roy, poet, satirist, dramatist, song-writer, who hailed from Krishnagar and is a by-word in cultured circles in Bengal. He was brought to my place by his younger friend (Dilip's chum) Hemanta Kumar Sarkar, another political worker and sufferer of Krishnagar. Dilip Kumar had just taken his Honours B. Sc. degree in Physics in the First Class and was going abroad. I still remember the cadence and beauty of the two or three songs he gave us at my place in 1919. We have met occasionally since : he seriously thought of joining Congress at one time but eventually kept out. He is an artist, a mystic, and a prolific writer. It is best that such a man kept out of the tangled ways of the political arena ! He received a great ovation at a Calcutta meeting recently organised in celebration of his 50th birthday when a purse of about 25 thousand rupees was also presented to him. I could not be present : I was at

my sick-bed, but I was very much pleased that Calcutta honoured such a man. A close friend and associate of Subhas Bose, a disciple of Sri Aurobindo, pioneer of a new style of music, writer, singer, devotee, artist—it is a rare combination that we find in this illustrious son of an illustrious father.

Anyway, the Krishnagar and Nadia of 1919 and of 1921 and still further of 1946 are very distinct. The town has developed, there is much greater evidence of life and of progressive movements—and during later years, a great stimulus was given to the political life of Nadia by an old junior colleague of mine—Professor Bireswar Bose, the only man in Government Educational Service who had the hardihood and idealism to follow my example and resign a lucrative Government appointment later in 1930 and throw himself into the thick of the Congress fight. He earned the respect and love of thousands inside and outside the District, had to suffer long terms of imprisonment on more than one occasion, was a non-violent Satyagrahi of the sweetest brand and died of tuberculosis about a year ago, mourned by large number of his countrymen. Another who has worked heart and soul for the district is Haripada Chatterjee, a bright student of Chemistry who after getting a First Class in M.Sc. in Chemistry, joined the 1921 movement. He has had a chequered life—at one time he and another Congressman of great courage and a gentleman who never cared for so-called 'social opinion', started a dairy-firm at the outskirts of Dacca City and used, unashamed, to lead the cattle home, through the streets of Dacca and the grounds of the University of Dacca, thoroughly impervious to any criticisms of their pastoral lives amidst banalities of town luxury. Haripada Chatterjee has founded an *Ashrama*—an agricultural farm, a series of small schools, a laboratory etc., at Sahebnagar, about 30 miles off Krishnagar and that is now one of the Bengal centres of basic education controlled by the Kasturba Memorial Trust. In 1917, he would have been a bold man who could have prophesied such things as possibilities in Nadia and Krishnagar—it was a place with ancient historical tradition and fame gone to sleep. But it has risen from its slumber, shaken off its lethargy and is now marching on, steadily, to Freedom !

Before I leave the story of Krishnagar to follow my fortunes in the next phase at Chittagong, I must not omit to mention

that whatever my differences had been with Mr. Wordsworth and Mr. Gilchrist, they always treated me before everybody else and in private with great courtesy. The persons were not so much at fault as the 'closed' system in which these men had to work. Mr. Wordsworth is now Associate Editor of the *Statesman* and is doing excellent service both as a front-rank journalist and as one of the members of the Bengal Assembly from a European Constituency. We sometimes meet and he is quite cordial. Mr. Gilchrist got away from Education and accepted an appointment as Labour Commissioner and later became Reforms Commissioner to the Bengal Government and has now retired.

#### CHITTAGONG

Now I proceed to relate the story of Chittagong. I shall also deal with those experiences and events that fell in my way before I took the final jump, 'threw away the dog's collar' to quote from a letter written by Sir P. C. Ray to me after I had resigned and joined the country's struggle.

Even before I reached Chittagong, matters had been smoothed for me by two of my cousins who were there and by Mr. Dutt, a senior friend of mine, who was in 1919 Civil Surgeon at *Rangamati*, the official Government station of the Chittagong Hill Tracts, which are administered by three semi-feudatory 'Chiefs', the most cultured and influential being the Raja of Rangamati, the Chief of the Chakma tribe—at that time Raja Bhuban Mohan Roy, who had studied up to the B. A. at the Presidency College, Calcutta, a few years before me. The Raja's eldest son Kumar Nalinaksha had just matriculated and the Raja wanted to place him at Chittagong College (the Raja had several bungalows perched on hilly elevations at Chittagong town, the bungalow occupied by the Divisional Commissioner also belonging to him, his own officers and a retinue of servants living in his town residence on a nearby hillock) under proper guardianship. Mr. Dutt talked about me and the Raja was very anxious that I should take charge of his son as guardian-tutor. A decent allowance and the free use of a good bungalow just adjacent to the Raja's own (this was also in the Raja's possession) were arranged for me. So when I came to Chittagong under transfer, I came with an added income and an

added prestige. The Raja's carriage also was at my disposal whenever I required it and gifts from the Raja's home establishment at Rangamati—vegetables and fruits and poultry often came. Kumar Nalinaksha (he has now succeeded his father after his demise : a graduate of Calcutta, he married into Keshub Chandra Sen's family and is a Raja now) was a very gentle lad and gave me no trouble. It was a delight to teach him and the Raja's occasional visits to Chittagong were a source of great pleasure—he was so affable and so democratic in his ways.

After a few months, the Raja invited me to visit Rangamati and though I did not have any scruples to dine with him, he, in his goodness, advised me to take my own Brahmin cook with me, for Chittagong 'society' was very conservative and people would 'talk' if I dined openly with a 'Magh' Chief—who was only half Hindu. In fact the Raja's language was Chakma and we could make neither head nor tail of it. It was some sort of corrupt (?) Arakanese with snatches of the Chittagong dialect incorporated. The Chittagong dialect, by the way, is full of nasal sounds, mostly skipping hard and harsh consonants and is very sweet and musical to the ear—but not at all understandable by other Bengalis and our experience of two worlds so juxtaposed at Rangamati was rather interesting. On one side of the Karnafuli river, was the Civil Station of Rangamati—staffed by a Deputy Commissioner, a Civil Surgeon and a Superintendent of Police and provided with law-courts administering the British-Indian laws, civil and criminal, and a High English School of the usual Bengal official pattern. On the other side was the Raja's small palace with its out-houses and kutcheries and guest-rooms (not a very big affair) with its old-world ways where the Raja ran his home in a happy-go-lucky way, treated all his people who came with gifts of venison and vegetables to pay him respects, administered the customary laws and kept up a pretence of some 'independence', while subject in all essential matters to the control of the Divisional Commissioner. The income of the entire Estate was only about a lakh of rupees which was supplemented by some zemindary property which brought in another fifty thousand. The Raja lived a simple and unostentatious life in his own person, but his outlay was more than his income—for there were any number of dependants and

domestics, men and women, and not much of disciplined economy and management.

It was, I recollect, some time in mid-May that I started in response to the Raja's invitation to visit Rangamati on a comfortable boat accompanied by a younger brother and my eldest boy, neither of them hardly over ten, with a cook and a servant recruited in Chittagong. It was a journey of about 80 miles and the route was along the zigzags of the Karnafuli river and upstream : the river shrank in width as we proceeded—we spent the nights in some populated localities on the river—but when we had gone up about 40 miles, the settlements grew sparse in population often dwindling into assemblages of insignificant huts, the banks of the river on both sides became more and more overgrown with jungle, till we actually came to a halt near a forest reserve where we were entertained by the forest Ranger. Then the scenery became still more wild with steep overhanging rocks and blocks of stone flung by nature on the river—with peculiar shapes like elephants or tortoises—and as we proceeded, we sighted some women dressed in picturesque hill-costume, ruddy in complexion, with well-formed physique, pictures of health and vigour, due certainly to their open-air life of freedom, passing by the river-front to their homes from the thick jungle, with cutting instruments tucked into their waists and loads of bamboo and varieties of grass and leaves on their backs. The next halt was at a place where there was a Christian Mission and a hospital. The third day saw us at Rangamati : the Raja's palace was a few minutes' walk from the river and we reached it in the afternoon, just before dusk.

The hospitality was generous and the Raja himself came to enquire about our comforts. There was not much of tidiness or discipline in the ranks of the servants—for what was our surprise to see one day a free fight between two big-boned bulls in the outer compound of the Raja's courtyard (with which nobody interfered) on which stood the bungalow and the kitchen-shed which had been placed at our disposal. After a few days, the Raja accompanied by his sons, including my ward, and retinue of servants, took us to a *Kutchery* about 15 or 20 miles in the interior. Presents of venison came for us and the men who had brought them were entertained and introduced to the Raja and then left.

We found specimens of deer as big as almost an ordinary bullock killed by hunters, and their flesh being 'smoked' for storage. We went out on a *shikar*-party, bagging a wild fowl and a few birds—and we were treated to a special very hot preparation of fish, put in bamboo vessels and baked in the oven mixed up with plenty of chillies—and to this day I remember the experience of trying to eat this hillman's delicacy—it was terrible! We began to perspire and feel queer and gave up the attempt to tackle the cooked fish in despair—but the Raja and his boys had no such difficulty—they were used to such fare.

We often took long rambles. It was a very thinly populated region—there was hillock upon hillock, mound upon mound and jungle and large open spaces and here the common man seemed 'carefree' and contented. We also had some first-hand acquaintance with *jhum* cultivation—*i. e.*, cultivation of plots of land in the hill-slopes by the hillmen. It was a very interesting process—first the trees growing on the slopes were 'fired' and then felled—and thus clearings were made in the jungly and hilly regions—and then all manner of seeds were put into the soil by *Daos*, (cutting instruments of a peculiar shape manufactured by local smiths),—*e. g.*, cotton, cucumber, chillies, paddy, gourds etc. As each variety grew and became fit for being gathered, it was harvested, leaving the other shoots to grow.

Thus a month passed in gathering novel impressions and experiences in very picturesque surroundings. Meanwhile we had taken a trip to the 'rapids' of *Barkal*, not very far from the Lushai Hills border—80 or 100 miles further up the river: we halted at the places of several 'Dewans' *i. e.*, the King's Yeomen *en route* and were sumptuously fed. We had a new experience: our plates were placed in either silver or brass tripods—nobody in those areas put their plates on the ground like we do in the plains—we found even the common man placing his dinner on bamboo tripods and I have wondered if their ways, in this particular matter, were not worthy of imitation, for our ways of squatting on the ground on wooden seats or carpets or *durries* and eating out of plates with bent backs are certainly much less civilised than these primitive hillmen's ways. The 'rapids' of *Barkal* are really a most interesting sight—the Karnafuli river has here shrunk to a width of not more than 20 or 30 feet and

the tremendous speed of the water-flow is such that slight want of caution on the part of the bather would mean sure death. One would be carried away by the flow and have his head and limbs reduced to pulp by the action of the flow on the pebbles in the river-bed ! The roar of the 'rapids' can be heard from miles away and the scenery on the banks is wild and romantic to a degree.

I had thus seen more of Chittagong than many stay-at-home colleagues and even many of the inhabitants and settlers of Chittagong and we came back in better health and spirits, richer in experience of nature's wild beauties and fuller of admiration for Chittagong.

Chittagong City is a straggling proposition of over 8 or 10 miles—very picturesque with the Karnaphuli flowing on to the Bay of Bengal which is only 10 miles from the jetty and port area, with lots of steam-launches and thousands of *sampans*, the peculiar light boats of various sizes and propelled by only one man from the stern with a couple of oars—and other kinds of boats, which have to be specially made, the fixings being not of iron nails but of cane ropes, so that the salt water would not eat into them, the wide river-front, the jetties and the moorings, the well-appointed port from which sea-going vessels sail for Burma and Europe—the hillocks looking on as it were as guardian spirits—and the nice bungalows of wood and bamboo and corrugated iron painted in various colours perched on small hilly mounds or hillocks—the wide belts of jungle forming serried specks of green in the distant horizon !

The College in Chittagong was not a very big thing : it was affiliated in Pass B.Sc. and B.A. with Honours in English, Sanskrit and Pali (this was specially taught, for Chittagong has a Buddhist population of a lakh—the only remnant in modern India of the Buddhists), so far as I can recollect. The staff was 100 p.c. Indian there—though before my time there had been a succession of European Principals. In my time the Principal (offg.) was Purna Chandra Kundu, a First Class man in Physics, who was a very nice gentleman and did nothing without consulting us. The President of the Governing Body was Mr. K. C. De, I.C.S., the Commissioner of the Chittagong Division, between whom and myself there was this link—that his younger brother also an I.C.S., Probodh Chandra De,

was my fellow-student in the Presidency College during the B. A. stage.

Chittagong is a port : Chittagong is the headquarters of the Assam Bengal Railway and the workshops of this Railway were in Chittagong, in an area known as Pahartali : it is a big business centre and it has had a very mixed population—Hindus, Buddhists, Muslims, Anglo-Indians and a few Panjabi officers of the Railway : European and Anglo-Indian Post officials—and besides, a large number of managers of business farms, European, Gujarati, Bengali. The Muslims were 87 p.c. of the District population : about 10 p.c. were Hindus and 2 p.c. were Buddhists (Baruas). The relations between this mixed population in the District and in the town itself were of the smoothest. The Chittagong Muslims have hardly cared for Government jobs, for most are hardy tillers of the soil, boatmen taking their boats up to Akyab on the Bay of Bengal, sturdy sea-faring *lascars* and crew of vessels sailing to Europe or workers in the mills and factories of Burma or prosperous merchants doing business on a big scale. The Chittagong Muslims are and were a nice community, led by a few lawyers and business magnates, whose lavish hospitality and genial courtesy I had many opportunities of putting to the test. The Brahmins in Chittagong were rather backward : the most progressive were the Vaidyas and Kayasthas : the Barua Buddhists were mostly simple agriculturists and farmers with a few businessmen, just a few College and school teachers, just a few administrative officers in Government service and a very few lawyers. Some of them were excellent cooks and earned good salaries in European hotels in Calcutta and elsewhere. The leader of the Buddhist community was Rev. Dhammadavansa—a Buddhist monk who was also a Pali lecturer in the College (his pupils—Mahima Ranjan Barua was a Professor of Pali at Chittagong and Dr. Beni Madhab Barua, Doctor of an English University, was Head of the Pali Department in Calcutta University). He had built and developed a Buddhist temple in the heart of the Chittagong town ; and by his selfless and untiring labours had raised a depressed community into one fast rising into importance, having given them the true principles of the Buddhist faith by precept and example and taught them cohesion. The European and Anglo-Indian bloc were kept in their proper places : the very fact that the Divisional

Commissioner was an Indian and during Durbars and Governmental functions, this coloured Bengali perforce took precedence. And Mr. De was a tall, muscular gentleman, of great tact and administrative ability—he had been a very able scholar of his time also and he had a great asset in his very intelligent and active wife, who was a Bengali lady to the tips amongst Indians and knew how to carry herself with dignity in European circles—who was respected by all and the small colony of whites—a few officials and a few agents of European firms like the Burma Oil Company and the Standard Oil Company—could not be arrogant. There was a Girls' High School and several Boys' Schools run with efficiency. When I went there, the big men of Chittagong—the famous poet Nabin Chandra Sen, the famed explorer and scholar of Tibetan and a few other recondite languages Sarat Chandra Das, the political leader Jatra Mohan Sen Gupta (father of Deshapriya Jatindra Mohan Sen Gupta) were no longer in the land of the living—but they had raised Chittagong in the estimation of entire Bengal. There was money also in Chittagong—earned in business in Rangoon, Akyab and Chittagong by traders and owners of rice and timber mills, big contractors of labour, and the Chittagong people I always found carrying their heads high.

In the College, there was one very distinguished colleague—Professor Surendranath Das Gupta—a finished philosophical scholar, learned both in Eastern and Western Philosophy. He was also conversant with higher literatures and himself wrote nice Bengali, prose and verse—and was fast rising into fame by the assiduous work on his volumes on Indian Philosophy. He was an 'old boy' of Berhampore (Bengal) and the munificent Maharaja Manindra Chandra Nandy of Cossimbazar had not only helped him to build up a magnificent Library of Philosophy and Literature and History and Economics but gave him a monthly subscription for his literary work and the expansion of his library. Professor Das Gupta was eventually transferred to the Presidency College and became Principal of the Calcutta Sanskrit College and Senior Post-Graduate Professor of Philosophy. He visited Europe and caught the ear of distinguished savants and philosophers there to come back with an added reputation. Another of my bright colleagues was Kshitis Chandra Roy, Professor of Chemistry, who has retired from the

Principalship of the Hooghly Government College recently, a very able teacher and a successful administrator, tactful and really patriotic. But the nicest was the Buddhist monk Rev. Dhammadavansa. He was a constant visitor at my place and often met my father who had accompanied me to Chittagong, where he was destined to die in January, 1920 ; and I often visited his temple and accompanied him to Buddhist centres and festivals and fair. I began to study a little of Buddhism and was really charmed with the realist attitude of Buddhism to life and regulation of life according to a fixed programme of disciplines—and this had a very marked influence on my subsequent career.

I began my work of organising the College on a new basis shortly after I took up my duties. I found that the students, though not very brilliant scholars, were generally active and energetic, and could be trained for team-work : they only wanted a lead and direction. So I started the College Union with Mr. De, the President of the Governing Body, as Patron and spread the Union into several branches for Literary and Scientific debates and discussion, for a special Bengali Literature section, for the College Magazine section, the Athletic section etc., putting in a mixed group of Professors and students in control, with a student as Organising Secretary. The result was wonderful : the College teams won every League and Shield match in the town. The College Bengali Literature Union was a great success : the debates and discussions were held with regularity. The College Magazine was run with enthusiasm and efficiency. I was studying Hindu and Buddhist theology and philosophy and gave a few lectures on these topics. There was a College function where I read a paper on the future possibilities of the development of Chittagong City and port and the College with a preliminary survey of the region's natural and historical background : this gave a tone to the students' local patriotism. I encouraged athletics and games. I discouraged any the least exhibition of communalism and special favours and spoon-feeding inside the college organisations for particular communities. College life in Bengal has been cheated of all its fine purposes by the encouragement of rank and blatant communalism by certain political wire-pullers : the result has been a vast deterioration both in morals and national soli-

darity amongst students, with most tragic effects on our common life and interests.

I had the supreme gratification of my life when barely two years later, the College organisation with its training in the practice of unity and discipline bore such marvellous fruits in the heroic abandon with which students irrespective of community and religion, threw themselves into the national struggle of 1921, when J. M. Sen Gupta and myself led Chittagong and the neighbouring districts and raised the 'tempo' of political work to a very high pitch, unsurpassed by any other place in India.

The friends I had in Chittagong were many. I remember, after my father's unexpected death early in 1920, to have performed the annual family *Durga Puja* at my place in Chittagong instead of at my village home and I had so many friends that I had to invite them on three consecutive days—the 'Hindu' males and relations one day, the ladies, next—and the Christian and Muslim and Buddhist friends—on the third, the 'Vikrampur' group settled in the town and the Raja of Rangamati and the Roy family helped me in various ways and attended the entertainments. We had other sorts of fun—thus I arranged a friendly football match between the Bar and the College staff. I was then in charge of the College and though not much of a player, I took the lead—we had a two days' play—and there was lavish entertaining. Also we had a mixed Indian 'Club' where billiards and tennis and indoor games and cards were played and we had often subscription dinners which made some of us rather sick. Once we attended the wedding-feast of a young colleague in a village and my present of a *charka* (it was 1920)—the Gandhi-sponsored *charka*—raised a good deal of flutter.

Before this two or three important trips had been taken—to Sitakundu and its neighbouring places of pilgrimage—and to Cox's Bazar on the Bay of Bengal. I had also visited some of the important mofussil centres including Patiya, later the spear-head of the nationalist movement. It was from this *thana* and locality that most of the heroic fighters of 1921 in Chittagong including the leader J. M. Sen Gupta came! So I had been a familiar figure in the whole district, so to say, in the course of my two years' work at the College.

But my sudden visit to the Nagpur Congress which in December

1920 ratified and confirmed the Non-co-operation resolution passed in the Special Session held in Calcutta in October, 1920—on a sudden impulse encouraged by my old Rajshahi pupil Satya Priya Banerjee (we travelled together, teacher and pupil)—was the most memorable event of my pre-Congress life in Chittagong. This visit, where I saw, heard and took the measure of Gandhiji for the first time, brought to a head my cherished desire to throw off the galling yoke of Government service and join India's Freedom Movement.

## CHAPTER IV ON THE ROUGH SEAS

IN BENGAL (1921-23) : IN BURMA (1923-25)

Now I come to a big change in my life. I was thirty-six in 1921 and had been 15 years a College teacher in some of the biggest Government Colleges in Bengal and in two small Indian-managed smaller Colleges in Patna and Sylhet. But the *master-bias* of my mind and heart—striving for the freedom of my country from the shackles of British bondage—which had found free play for a year in the glorious days of the Swadeshi movement of 1905—had never been blunted: rather its edges had been sharpened by larger experience of the world and the social and economic conditions in Bengal and by the conflicts with white Heads of the Government educational centres and the bosses of the Bengal Department of Public Instruction and by my inside acquaintance with the policies of the Government-controlled University of Calcutta. I despaired of any good to be derived either from the Universities as constitute (in spite of the heroic achievements of Sir Asutosh Mookerjee and his intelligent side-tracking of the revolutionary phases of the National Movement and imaginative acceptance of the more moderate and constructive ideas e. g., the Indianisation of the University from top to bottom agencies, the securing of a better position in the scheme of studies for Bengali language and literature, the organisation of a solid Indian bloc in the University Senate, Syndicate and the Faculties and Boards of Studies which kept the white elements at

bay)—and I knew that there was no future for my country unless the foreign soul-less and mechanical Bureaucracy of whites and their Indian henchmen were replaced by an effective Government ‘of the People, by the People, and for the People’.

The lessons of 1905-19 had been seared into our hearts and brains : we had passed through peaceful constitutionalism, under-ground terrorist ‘coups’, wide-spread boycott of British goods and institutions—all ‘the big promises and smooth excuses’ of the British Cabinet and Government at Whitehall : we had seen the British Power bending before the revolutionary movement and struggle of Bengali youthful elements who had the hardihood to sail the ‘un-charted’ seas for years, without much of visible support from the country’s masses (for the masses were yet absolutely dis-organised and ‘young Bengal’ dreamt of a forcible seizure of power by a small minority—a dream which never could come true !)—and the ‘unsettling’ of the ‘settled fact’—the partition of Bengal in 1912. We had passed through the World War of 1914-18, its incalculable ups and downs, had rejoiced in British reverses, had seen the end of a big revolutionary effort at an armed rising and gun-running through German assistance—had seen lakh of Indians being recruited for and joining the British army services as ‘sepoy’s and ‘lascars’. We had witnessed the big drive againt and internment of large groups of patriotic youth in Bengal in 1917, had heard of small ‘mutinies’ in the Panjab, suppressed with an iron hand, and of the ‘Komagata-Maru’ episode organised (alas, with such tragic results !) by members of the Sikh Gadhri Party in America. We had seen British diplomacy again at work and confronting us with the Montagu-Chelmsford ‘reforms’ of 1919—the setting up of provincial ‘Dyarchies’, a hope-less division of political power between ‘Whites’ and ‘natives’ foredoomed to failure, which failure was precipitated by the Rowlatt Act and the Jallianwallabagh massacre in 1919. We had seen the Congress ‘leftist’ shoving aside the ‘moderate’ elements at Surat in 1907 and getting into the saddle effectively by 1920—and I was only marking time to fall into line with the Nationalist fighters.

Though permeated with the revolutionary ideas since 1905, I have always been by nature and upbringing a believer in straight dealing and open measures : I had no stomach for the secret methods of the

Revolutionary Bengal Groups, though I knew many of the leaders and they knew me and my real mind. As early as 1907, when I was a Professor in the Presidency College, Pulin Behari Das and Makhan Lal Sen, two of the big Revolutionary bosses (of course, they were ostensibly organising Physical Culture clubs, Gita-Vivekananda study-circles, etc,) of Dacca visited my village home and Pulin Babu who really was the soul of the *Anusilan Samiti* of East Bengal, himself gave physical demonstrations before an enthusiastic gathering of village gentry and peasants—I had also made a small contribution to the Physical Culture organisation. These matters were mentioned later on, in court trials, but nobody interfered with or interrogated me. My policy as a servant of the Bengal Government was straight and clear—loyalty and co-operation in all measures of good, and intelligent and persistent refusal of co-operation with injustice and measures calculated to stifle the normal, healthy development, moral, physical and intellectual, of youths placed under my care.

All my 15 years' life as college teacher was devoted to this plan and I may say, at the fag end of my life, that in spite of heavy odds, I could have raised College Education in Bengal to a real and effective national content, if I had found colleagues in appreciable numbers to fall in with my views and work alongside of me. Such teachers were, however, few and far between and I had often to plough a lonely furrow. The only College where I could work to some purpose was the Rajshahi College, for there gathered a small group of teachers, bent on students' welfare, self-respecting and with courage of conviction, not bent solely upon 'prospects'. In Krishnagar and Chittagong what I could accomplish was by sheer effort of will and as soon as I had left, organisations gradually lost vitality—the persons were not there to keep them going. In fact, nothing solid or permanent or great can be achieved by half-hearted compromise: and with me (I speak sincerely, without pride or vanity), it has always been 'neck or nothing'. If I have believed in a cause I have worked for it sedulously and zealously, 'in scorn of consequence' and I have never lost. I write these words, with the hope that they might enthuse later-day educational and political and social workers with these fundamental, 'bed-rock' principles. I have found and still find so much of backsliding or half-heartedness in all ranks in my country—so much of mere clever opportunism

and compromise and so-called 'adjustment' that these words of caution are necessary. Adjustment, I am led perforce to ask—with what? Compromise—yes,—but on what plane? There can never be any beneficial and fruitful adjustment with the forces of evil, of falsehood, of perversion: any compromise requiring us to throw the fundamentals of truth and reality to the dustbin, is not only temporary but a positive evil, fraught in the long run with awful consequences.

To cut a long story short: my ideas about serving the country had been re-inforced by the emergence on the Indian scene of Gandhiji in 1917 at Champaran, when my old friend Rajendra Prasad joined him—and I was thinking of getting out of Government service and its inhibitions since 1917. In 1919 the Rowlatt Bill agitation and the Jallianwallabagh atrocities had strengthened this impulse. My visit to the Congress of Nagpur in 1920 and first-hand impression of 'Gandhiji' (this man 'cuts us all out'—I said to my own mind) as a super-man with hidden reservoir of energy, as a Leader of tremendous power and drive—and also the impression driven into me by the huge assembly of men and women—the sturdy and free women of Maharashtra specially who had gathered in thousands there—practically prepared me morally and intellectually for the 'big jump'. I had met C. R. Das and some other political leaders of Bengal at Nagpur: they were all surprised to see me, a Government College Professor, openly moving about from camp to camp, trying to get hold of various reactions, and attending, of course, as a visitor, the open sessions of the Congress. Many of them did not realise that I had already mentally decided 'to burn my boats' and was only biding my time and waiting for a psychological opportunity. I was present at the 'fracas' that occurred amongst delegates of the Bengal camp over some political issues. In the Bengal contingent, there were many warring groups, manouevring for ascendancy, I found that no leader, not even Das could compose the storm. But, lo! Gandhiji came, addressed the delegates for 15 minutes or less and there was calm! This was a small incident: but it has never vanished from my memory. It produced a pro-found impression on me and confirmed me in the faith that Gandhiji's personal magnetism and tact were really extraordinary.

Meanwhile there were domestic tragedies : first, the loss of my revered father (after seven weeks of terrible suffering from sloughing dysentery during which he left for us a legacy of great strength of mind, infinite patience and devotion to the Invisible Presence never to be forgotten). I asked him just before power of speech was leaving him, for a final message for the conduct of my life and for some detailed instructions about family affairs. He had only one curt message 'Do your duty'. This was followed, a few months after, by the death of my only surviving married young sister, a girl still in her teens under very suspicious conditions in her husband's village home. It was really a suppressed case of suicide, brought on, perhaps, by bad treatment or undue suspicion, God knows. These tragedies had produced in me a frame of mind in which the uncertainties of worldly life became a realisation—and my reading of scriptures and specially of the *Ishopanisad* confirmed me in this mental revolution where the Reality of the Divine and a call to a life of controlled enjoyment and abnegation became surcharged with reality.

I was morally and mentally attuned like this, when the visit of C. R. Das to Chittagong came about with far-reaching results with respect to the future destinies of not only my own personal life but of hundreds and thousands of lives in the Division of Chittagong.

The open session of the Congress at Nagpur had called upon the country to boycott the legislatures, to withdraw from the Government Colleges and Schools, to boycott the law courts—as negative measures of, 'non-violent non-cooperation,'—and later on the Mahatma asked the country also to concentrate on the enrolment of 1 *crore* of Congress volunteers, on the setting up of 1 *crore* of spinning wheels and on the collection of a Swaraj Fund of 1 *crore* of rupees—these were to be the 'munitions' of the non-violent fight for the attainment of Swaraj within one year, i.e., the 31st of December, 1921 and the redress of the 'Khilafat wrong.'

The response was phenomenal ; and the Governments in Britain and India and the Provinces were simply non-plussed by the unexpected magnitude of the movement that gathered force and momentum by leaps and bounds. The tagging on of the Khilafat question (the restoration of the Sultan of Turkey—the 'Khalifa' of

the Muslim world) to the movement for Swaraj, was a master-stroke of the *Mahatma*—and this double-edged struggle brought Hindu and Muslims on one platform and cemented a unity of aim and action which had never before been dreamt of or achieved (except in the days of '1857').

Chittagong had, I have already told, a teeming, an overwhelmingly preponderant Muslim population and the average Chittagong Muslim was a person of initiative, daring and adventurous quality. So Chittagong had been 'screwed up' by the Khilafat agitation and the waves of it beat against the colleges and schools—and it was with great difficulty that discipline could be maintained. I told the boys frankly that those who wanted really to serve the country and respond to the Congress call, should leave the College and join the fray, but I saw no sense in interrupting the normal life of the College by mere demonstrations and shoutings of slogans. The more unintelligent and fussy types of students saw in me a great opposer of the movement (these were mostly Muslim boys, I believe) and I received threatening letters. I carried on and did my duty by the College and went on supporting measures of discipline and the Principal was really appreciative, for my hold on the students was a reality.

Meanwhile C. R. Das and Motilal Nehru had given up their phenomenally big practice at the Bar—C. R. Das for good—directly after returning from Nagpur—and the Bar of India followed their lead and many lawyers all over the country suspended their practice for 3 or 6 months and some gave it up altogether. Dr. Prafulla Chandra Ghosh resigned his lucrative job as Deputy Assayer of the Calcutta Mint, Dr. Sures Banerji, M.B., who had joined the I.M.S. during the world war and might have been absorbed into the permanent cadre, also resigned his Commission—and they together, with Dr. Nripen Bose, and Annada Chowdhury and Haripada Chatterjee (both of them bright M.Sc.s of Calcutta) with Mihirlal Chatterjee and others—a group of about 25 young men—formed themselves into a body of workers, dedicated to the Service of the Nation, taking the vows of 'poverty, chastity and obedience'—and what was more significant—of 'fearlessness'—(*abhaya*) and formed the nucleus of the *Abhay Ashram* first at Dacca and then at Comilla—a group who were destined to push the constructive programme of

Gandhiji and the Congress with excellent results in several centres, and they did not keep away from active political fight and were always ready to bear its brunt and embrace suffering and imprisonment. It was a community, a brotherhood of vowed celebates whose earnings, if any, were to go to the common pool : the president was Dr. Sures Banerji and the next in authority was Dr. Prafulla Ghosh. It was a replica of the Servants of India Society founded by Gokhale with a more virile and daring outlook on life and politics. Many leading lawyers suspended practice as C. R. Das (by now he had been given the affectionate honorific title of *Deshabandhu* by his admiring countrymen) visited district after district. B. N. Sasmal at Midnapore (one of the sincerest and toughest of us), Akhil Datta and Kamini Kumar Datta and many others at Comilla, Sris Chatterji and many more at Dacca, Surendranath Biswas at Madaripur, Nagendranath Mukherji at Hooghly, Amar Dutt and Jadabendra Panja at Burdwan—to name just a few, became C. R. Das's right hand men in the tearing campaign of 1921. Subhas Chandra Bose resigned his I.C.S. while still in England and joined Congress and C. R. Das in May or June, 1921 : Kiran Sankar Roy also joined about this time. It was the high-tide of the Non-co-operation agitation, when enthusiasm broke all bounds and there was a 'fever-heat in the Nation's pulse, urging large multitudes into frenzied ecstasy and uttermost 'abandon' in activity that threw all calculation to the winds. In March (I believe it was the 14th of March, 1921) Deshabandhu Chittaranjan Das landed in Chittagong and became a guest of J. M. Sen Gupta, then a young practising Barrister at the High Court at Calcutta. J. M. Sen Gupta was the son of an illustrious and patriotic father, who had died, full of years and honours, a few years ago in Chittagong where he enjoyed a big practice and a bigger prestige and was its undisputed leader from the days of 1905. Sen Gupta had married an English wife and she had been received into the family with open arms—Mrs. Nellie Sen Gupta,—whose is an honoured name in India and Bengal, a lady who has adopted her husband's principles and her husband's homeland as her very own—and Sen Gupta and his family still hold the foremost place in Chittagong's affection.

Deshabandhu had been accompanied, amongst others, by my young friend Hemanta Kumar Sarkar of Krishnagar. Hemanta after

receiving a first class degree in the M.A. in Sanskrit, had been working as a junior Lecturer and research Scholar in Calcutta University in 1921 and he had come out and joined the Congress and attached himself to the personal retinue of C. R. Das. Deshabandhu addressed a mammoth meeting at Chittagong on the 15th of March and I was an on-looker and listener from a distance—for how could a Government College Professor be one of the audience and that prominently—specially in the town of his employment? I was asked by some important man to move up closer to C. R. Das and I replied truthfully that a man with the slave's badge on, could hardly aspire to a seat near to that Prince of Free men, Deshabandhu Das.

In the evening Hemanta came to see me and I invited him to my place next day. He told me next morning that C. R. Das has asked him why *he* was not invited and I had to tell him with a choked voice that I was not worthy to extend an invitation (though it would be a point of great honour for *me*) to a man like Das. On the evening of the 16th Hemanta arranged an interview for me with C. R. Das at Sen Gupta's place and we had a private talk for about half-an-hour. I told Deshabandhu that my mind was ready for a response, but I was ruminating how I could pull on without any income (I was then earning about Rs. 700/- monthly), saddled as I was with a big family of 25 consisting of several poor college boys whom my wife and myself had taken in as 'proteges'. Deshabandhu replied that the question had intrigued him also in his own case but if one meant to take the jump, he had to take it in faith and 'in scorn of consequence'. Then I asked him a relevant question—'if I gave up my high Government post, did he think it very likely that a large number would follow my example and 50 or even 100 high-placed Government officials would come out and join the Congress'? Here he charmed me by his intensely truthful reply : Well, that was very uncertain. Such large-scale resignations might materialise, might not. 100 people might be animated by my example : on the other hand, it was quite possible, not a single—not even one other—man would follow in my steps. If I was inclined to respond to the call, if my patriotic urge was serious, let me come out, without any expectations that or any other way. This reply helped me to make up my mind at once. I was a big 'catch' for the movement

and any other might have attempted to hook me in anyhow ; not so Deshabandhu, the soul of truth and honour ! I had some more discussion with him—it was midnight and I left him.

I kept awake till the small hours of the morning, had not the courage to tell even my wife who was by my side that I was resigning and that she and the children and the family must perforce prepare for a life of great hardship and uncertainty (though I had tried, after my return from the Nagpur Congress, to indicate by open hints that my mind was cogitating that way !) ; and then I wrote out a simple letter of resignation, addressed it to the Principal and requested him to send it up to Government. But I plainly stated that I had lost all faith in the official system of Education and was going out for an all-out effort in reconstructing a better system ; and I could not wait and give any formal notice. With this note, I saw C. R. Das at about 6 in the morning of the 17th March. He was agreeably surprised and he warned me that Government might dismiss me for lack of proper notice. I told him I hardly cared if it was dismissal or resignation—for I had burnt my boats and did not care about Government's attitude in the matter.

And at about 8 A.M. the town was 'a-gog' with the story of my doing—about a thousand people assembled in a meeting, before whom I announced my resignation and presented myself, my very young boys and two young brothers for the country's whole-hearted service. Meanwhile there was a hurried summoning of the College Governing Body and I was requested not to attend College till my resignation was formally accepted by the Government of Bengal. Mr. De, the Divisional Commissioner, sent emissary after emissary (high-placed officials) with the object of persuading me to retract and withdraw my resignation, but I remained firm and said my resignation was final. It was on the morning of the 17th of March, 1921 that I began my new life as a political worker and fighter in the Congress ranks.

Thus began a new chapter in my life and in the annals of Chittagong : for my resignation and immediate offer of service to the Congress had its repercussions all over the district and the Province. I was fairly well-known throughout the Province by 1921 : the psychological effect on Chittagong and the neighbouring districts,

specially on the student-community, was tremendous ; and throughout the Division, the boycott of educational institutions became almost absolute and the movement gathered head by the accession of hundreds of senior college boys and thousands of the younger fry.

J M. Sen Gupta had begun by suspending his practice for three months at C. R. Das's behest, while he was his guest—and we formed a District Congress Committee with Sen Gupta as President and naturally with myself as his second in command. Round us gathered the lawyers Mahim Chandra Das of the Chittagong Bar, Prasanna Kumar Sen\* of the Patiya Bar—Tripura Charan Chowdhury, who later on organised the first Indian Bank in Chittagong—the Mahaluxmi Bank, Sheikh Kajem Ali Meah who died as an M.L.A. (Central) after a life of courage and activity for the cause—a commoner—wielding very great influence amongst Muslims, Swami Dinanand (who came out of his job as Lecturer in the Sibpur Engineering College and took up the monk's robe and was a great force in the Labour front, Kripal Das Udasi—a rich Mohunt of the town, controlling the Sikh Gurdwara—of the most blameless character and highest patriotism. Round these gathered young lawyers, school masters, and a core of senior students, Hindu and Muslim—also the silent, mysterious revolutionary (we knew him as a graduate nationalist school master who was with us in the Congress—but the revolutionaries knew better) Suryya Sen of the Armoury raid fame, who took charge of the *Musti Bhiksha* (a house-to house collection of rice contributions, which were sold and fetched Rs. 700/- per month—a large sum no doubt !) organisation in the town enrolling 50 or 60 young lads (including my boys and brother) under him.—and Ambica Charan Das (now Editor of the nationalist

\* He resigned at my instance and became my life-long friend and co-worker, a devout man, a singer of devotional and patriotic songs with great charm of voice and manner, who could lift thousands off their feet by his singing. A man of utmost sincerity and truthfulness—he died about 10 years ago at Deoghar and his sons came in for very severe repression at the hands of Government in the fateful years of 1930 and after—after the Chittagong Armoury Raid had taken place and there was a state of war for 4 long years between Government and the Revolutionaries of Chittagong led by that hero without parallel—Suryya Kumar Sen, than whom a more self-restrained and efficient and silent worker for the nation's cause in or out of Congress I have nowhere met.

daily of Chittagong—*The Panchajanya*), Sailendranath Chowdhury (now an M.A., B.L. and lawyer at Chittagong—one of my most devoted pupils, who had boycotted his M.A. examination), Satya Prasanna Sen (who has now risen to be Chief Manager, controlling the big Bengal Chemical and Pharmaceutical Works founded by Sir P. C. Ray from start as a junior chemical assistant—who also had boycotted his B.Sc. examination)—Dwijendranath Koondoo, Barada Prasad Nandy and Surendranath Das (a fine singer and organiser he was) among others. The Chittagong organisation under our lead electrified the entire countryside and we visited village after village, enthusing and enrolling people for active service, collecting Swaraj funds and, in general, preaching revolution by non-violent means. The result was that Chittagong became quickly the storm-centre of the Bengal movement, equalled only by Midnapur, under the forceful leadership of Birendranath Sasmal.

One of our first Congress journeys after I came into the organisation was to the Provincial Conference at Barisal—a Conference attended by at least 50,000. It was Barisal that had given me my first political baptism in 1905 and after 15 years, I again touched the soil of Barisal, this time as one of the leaders of the Bengal movement. The President was Bepin Chandra Pal—whose address was an intellectual treat but not in support of the Congress campaign and the methodology accepted by the country under Gandhiji's lead. C. R. Das, J. M. Sen Gupta, Akhil Dutt, B. N. Sasmal and many more were there. I was one of the extreme-left-wingers and took a leading part in discussing the resolutions and in moving the resolution on 'Nationalising of all educational institutions'. On the second day, I presided over the deliberations of a National Education Conference, where my friend and contemporary Principal Nritya Lal Mukherjee (who after 6 years of service as a Deputy Magistrate had resigned and accepted the Principalship of the Brojo Mohan College, Barisal founded by Aswini Kumar Dutt) opposed me but without success. The National Education resolution was passed unanimously amidst applause. The most outstanding feature of the Barisal Conference was the inspired address of Sj. Sarat Kumar Ghosh, a most eloquent and rousing address !

From Barisal I did not immediately return to Chittagong—but for about three or four weeks, visited many important places in Faridpur and Dacca districts, finishing up at Dacca town, and addressed large and enthusiastic audiences everywhere in support and elucidation of the N.C.O. movement. I was accompanied in this tour by my Chittagong friend and comrade Prasanna Kumar Sen and a few devoted pupil-workers. This tour confirmed our faith that the movement was making rapid strides in the countryside and was really shaping into a mass-movement. The songs with which my friend Prasanna Babu opened every meeting that I addressed still ring in my memory—so entralling they were ; the audience everywhere being ‘keyed up’ to the psychological frame of mind for receptivity to our addresses which followed. After this tour, we returned to Chittagong and busied ourselves with the Chittagong agitation.

I am not quite sure of my figures, but I believe we enrolled a lakh of members, raised a lakh of rupees and our *Charka*-campaign also was not without appreciable results.

The first tussle we of the Chittagong Congress group had, was with the Chittagong Branch of the Burma Oil Company—an English concern ; and it was eminently successful. This Company had a large establishment in Chittagong, employing a few hundred Bengali assistants with half-a-dozen European bosses at the top and it also employed a large labour contingent. We organised a labour union and one of the Bengali top assistants—Benode Behari Chakravarti—took a large part in its formation—with the result that he was discharged. We replied by declaring a lightning strike of the labour corps, the demands being immediate restoration of Chakravarti to his job and better wages for labour. The European Manager boasted that they might negotiate with Gandhi, but negotiate with and surrender to a man like Professor Banerji, they never would ! I sent back word that Gandhiji was a far cry from Chittagong and in fifteen days, I prophesied a state of things would arise when he would have to come to me and Sen Gupta for a settlement. Well, we were as good as our word and matters were speeded up by the son of the biggest labour-contractor, Surendrauath Das, joining us. The labourers struck work to a man—Sen Gupta, myself, Swami Dinanand and other workers fraternising with them and sitting down to dine in the open with ordinary ‘coolies’. The effect was electrical

We toured a good deal in the villages near about Patiya, the stronghold of nationalism, and I was disturbed to see how military police had visited many of the high schools, beaten the boys mercilessly before their teachers and insulted some of the teachers themselves.

The enquiry was concluded in about a week's time and we returned to Calcutta. The evidence was collected and the final report was, I understood, written by T.C. Goswami, then a Congressman in our front ranks, and we all signed it and published it in the Press.

A public meeting was called at the Town Hall by the Congress with Acharyya P. C. Ray in the chair. J. M. Sen Gupta and myself were the principal speakers. We spoke with passionate grief and my speech was frankly straight—*i.e.*, ‘seditious’. It was indeed an unheard-of outrage on the rules of ordinary administrative decency —this conduct of the head of a district charged with the welfare and safety of *lakhs* of people, himself the custodian of ‘law and order’ in his district, to so far forget himself as to aid and abet policemen in taking reprisals against innocent people, as Mr. Kemp had done. I represented this matter with respect to the brutal assault on students and teachers to the University Syndicate also.

I was prosecuted for a series of public speeches I had made in Calcutta over this incident before the-then Presidency Magistrate. My friend Dr. J. M. Das Gupta was also prosecuted on the same charge. I was sentenced to 9 months’ R. I. Dr. Das Gupta was similarly indicted.

I had managed to prolong the sedition case by legal processes for 14 months and entered jail on my own terms in January 1933 and came out after 7 months, in August 1933.

In the midst of this long-drawn-out prosecution, I managed to buy a garden-plot at Baidyabati, a smallish place in the Hooghly district only 16 miles from Calcutta with a municipality, a high school and a big market—an old place, full of decayed old respectable families, the scions of which were mostly assistants in European offices in Calcutta—and to build a retreat there; to marry my eldest boy\* (who by now

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\*I might here mention my connection for a short period with an organisation which should thrive. In 1930, the Calcutta University Institute—the rally-centre of

was a Professor of Economics in the Vidyasagar College); to settle the newly wedded couple in my new home;—and then I went to jail.

In the meantime, my friend J. M. Sen Gupta had gone over to England and did not leave any stone unturned to bring Chittagong matters to the notice of the Secretary of State for India and the Cabinet with the result that Mr. Kemp, the offending District Officer was discharged from the Indian Civil Service. But Sen Gupta was arrested by the police directly he landed at Bombay and put in detention at Ranchi, where at the age of 49 only, he suddenly died of heart-failure, early in August 1933, a few days before my release from my third term in Jail.

J. M. Sen Gupta was a ‘gentleman’ in the real sense of the term, in the grand old manner,—genial, courteous, affable, modest, obliging to a fault and thoroughly selfless and exceedingly courageous on matters of fundamental principle. Five times elected to the Mayoralty of Calcutta, pauperised by unflagging service in the nation’s cause, Sen Gupta was one of the most outstanding men of the generation that is now almost out-moded and he kept alive till death the flame lighted by his chief C. R. Das who had styled him ‘the uncrowned King of East Bengal’, as early as 1921. He was my best friend and unfailing comrade in Congress circles, and though only one year my junior at the Presidency College, of which he was an old boy like myself, he treated me as an elder brother and reposed in me the uttermost confidence.

active university and college boys—was practically captured by my eldest boy, who enrolled about a thousand student-members and various new activities were set going. Later, I was elected President of the General Section, defeating Principal Urquhart of the Scottish Church College. I initiated some ameliorative measures for the benefit of the students with the willing help of some of the senior members and the general backing of the juniors (students) and the Institute (it is not really a part or annexe of the Calcutta University but an organisation for supplementing college and university training with extra-academic activities, and is financed by the Government and the spacious building in which it is located, off College Square, had been constructed mainly out of Government funds) during my regime, was to all intents and purposes, a nationalist institution and the Congress Flag was hoisted on the premises on Independence Day in 1937. Recitation and music competitions, athletic competitions, physical culture exercises, debates and discussions on matters of national concern were encouraged.

Truth to tell, his death has been the grave of my front-rank political life.

On my release from jail in August 1933, I drove straight to Mrs. Sen Gupta's residence and almost burst into tears. But later, when I went to the memorial meeting for J. M. Sen Gupta in the Calcutta Town Hall the day after, I at once sensed that a big change for the worse, a rot, had set in amongst adherents of the Congress in Bengal. By 1933, the Congress had been reduced by Governmental oppression and suppression to a moribund state and inferior men, reactionaries and self-seekers, were strutting on the stage. One of them, who was also one of the organisers of the memorial meeting, to my great astonishment asked me if I would like to say anything about Sen Gupta. The request was made in such a perfunctory fashion that I said I would prefer to remain silent—besides my heart was too full of sadness at the bereavement.

If there was anybody in the Town Hall meeting competent to speak with knowledge about J. M. Sen Gupta, it was myself undoubtedly. We had joined the Non-co-operation struggle together in 1921, we had been companions in jail and in the broad bosom of the country, addressing conferences together, laying our heads together for concerting of measure after measure to meet emergent situations ; we had disagreed in 1922 and 1923 over the Swaraj Party tactics, we had been rejoined in common loyalty and the cause in 1925 and we had stood by each other till death. Even during the days of his bitter conflict with Subhas Bose for ascendancy in the councils of the Congress, I had stood firm as a rock, true to my principles of independent neutrality no doubt, but ever standing cheek by jowl with him, whenever the necessity arose.

Such friendship can never be forgotten and to this day Mrs. Nellie Sen Gupta and myself meet as brother and sister.

One of my other friendships was with a Scotsman, very much my senior, who came to know me through his love for my eldest boy. They had met on the platform of the co-operative movement. Sir Daniel Hamilton had been the doyen of the firm of Messrs. Mackinnon, Mackenzie & Co., and after retirement he had devoted himself to the active and fearless application of the principles of 'co-operation' amongst his tenants in two Estates he had built up—one

at *Baripada*, capital of the Mayurbhanj State in Orissa and another at his colony in the Sunderbans at Gosaba. Sir Daniel was a man of princely generosity, a democrat of democrats, with not a trace of racial bias, or pride of colour, a great lover of India and a true disciple of Christ. The only man with whom he had some likeness was my friend and brother C. F. Andrews. Andrews was an English teacher-missionary turned to the task of building a bridge of love between India and Great Britain, between the white and coloured peoples—between the upper master and the under-dogs, between Capital and Labour, landlord and tenant. Sir Daniel was a wealthy business magnate from Scotland who had learnt to make the welfare of his adopted country—India—his one absorbing passion in life, and he believed with his whole soul (and he devoted all his intellectual and moral and material resources also to this end) that the application of the principles of co-operation on the widest possible scale without any reservation was the keynote of the methodology of India's progress to health, wealth and prosperity,—which is only another name for Swaraj. He was also a very great admirer of Gandhi and Tagore : he sent my boy Benoyendra to Bombay in 1931 to meet Rabindranath Tagore as soon as his steamer touched port and get a message for his colony and for his work. Benoyendra brought it all right to Sir Daniel and he had it engraved in stone in large quotations.

Sir Daniel was very anxious that we should meet directly after I came out of jail in 1931 and he invited me specially to his Gosaba colony in the same year. The journey was rather interesting—up to Port Canning by train, and thence by a steamer launch, along the salt river flowing to the Bay of Bengal, to his settlement of about 12 square miles of land surrounded by crocodile-infested estuaries and flanked by jungles, the home of the Royal Bengal Tiger, where he had built a house (not over-pretentious but provided with hygienic devices against mosquitoes and other pests) for himself and his wife. The couple were true Christian missionaries in spirit and action. He provided at Gosaba decent quarters for his staff, a rice-mill (run on the co-operative system), a chain of primary schools in each of his villages with a central school for the training of elementary principles of co-operation, an agricultural

farm, a co-operative bank, and a church for his Christian tenants. He had two or three big English-made boats with smaller country-boats for transport.

When Sir Daniel had invited me he had (but I did not know of it), about the same time, invited Sir George Schuster and Lady Schuster. Sir George was then Finance Member of the Government of India and was a 'liberal' in politics. I found Sir Daniel's men waiting to take me from Port Canning to Gosaba by one of the big boats and there was every possible arrangement made for my comfort. I reached Gosaba late at night—the Union Jack hoisted in the landing-ghat to receive Sir George and his lady had been removed when I landed. Sir Daniel saw me shortly after I reached. His Bengali officers were all attention. Sir Daniel informed me of the arrival of the Finance Member and his wife (it was about midnight when we met) and politely enquired if I had any objections to meeting them at tea next morning. I said 'none', for I was told also that Sir George was keen on meeting a leading Congressman and exchange views.

We all met in the morning and met on most easy and cordial terms. We spent the whole day—morning and noon—also the afternoon, visiting the settlement, meeting the tenants in a bank meeting and exchanging notes.\* There was another gentleman also present—a Secretary to the German People's Co-operative who had come in connection with the Banking Enquiry Committee.

Sir Daniel Hamilton kept up his association with me till his last days. He was so good-hearted that when he learnt of the serious illness of my wife in 1931, he offered me the use of his bungalow at Baripada and had a special cottage prepared for the use of my wife. She could not go there, but with two of my boys, I spent a very pleasant month there, during which Sir Daniel came up for a few days and took me out and introduced me to Mr. P. K. Sen,

\*My boy and myself kept up a correspondence with Sir George. I had been invited by Lady Schuster to visit them at Delhi and when I was phoning up Lady Schuster, the news came that no reprieve had been given to Bhagat Singh, whose life Gandhiji himself had prayed for, and that he had been hanged that morning at Delhi Jail. Well, I dropped the receiver and had not the stomach for fraternising with any British official or his lady thereafter !

Bar-at-Law, who was then Dewan of the State. Mr. Sen was a nice man but he was Dewan of a native state and felt a bit uncomfortable when an active Congressman, recently out of jail, was presented to him.

I put on record these incidents and friendships on purpose. There need be no unfriendliness between a European and an Indian—as a matter of fact, people on the same plane of cultural, spiritual and moral achievement, specially if they can use a common language, are prone to feel alike on many things and share many interests in common—and it is the closed system of bureaucratic Government by circulars and orders and the lack of social intercourse between the two sections in our unfortunate country that are responsible for much of racial animosity, for frayed tempers and intolerant attitudes on both sides. A free man and a slave can never come together but those of us who have had a free spirit, though born in a country under foreign domination, and have never been victims to the 'inferiority complex,' have had no difficulty in making friends of Englishmen, Scotsmen and Americans. Racial exclusiveness will be a thing of the past as soon as India attains her birthright of Swaraj, when Indians and Englishmen will meet normally as equals. I say this advisedly, as I have seen lot of instances where even Indians who had been to European countries have been lacking in the elementary, common courage of meeting the European on equal terms in the land of their birth—the result partly of stunted upbringing by 'loyalist' parents and partly of the 'inferiority complex' bred by an atmosphere of supineness prevailing around them.

When, after my release in 1933, I saw the Principal of my College, Mr. Giris Chandra Bose, who had treated me with so much sense of loving consideration all these years, I found him rather cold and a bit uncomfortable. Principal Bose showed me the resolution passed by the college Governing Body, evidently under Governmental pressure, about myself. It amounted to my having been suspended from service during my period in jail and kept a very faint loophole for re-appointment. Principal Bose asked me to wait for the next meeting of the Governing Body but could not be definite as to when it would meet. I had a shrewd suspicion that they might try to impose dishonourable conditions on my

re-appointment or might not even re-appoint me at all. I thought it better to save Principal Bose the indignity of dispensing with the services of a professor who had been a pillar of his college during disturbed years and commanded the wide confidence of thousands of pupils. I went back to my residence, sent for my eldest boy and told him all the facts and he agreed with me that I should resign. I sent in my resignation at once, thanking Principal Bose and the Governing Body for all their past kindness. Next day a deputation of the college professors waited upon me and regretted I had resigned without consulting them. I told them that I had saved my face, and Principal Bose's face also, by my action and that my resignation was final.\*

The year 1933 thus ended for me with a practical retirement from educational work and public life. Milton's dictum 'They also serve, who stand and wait' was my solace in those days.

## CHAPTER VI

### A RECLUSE IN THE COUNTRYSIDE

(1934-36)

I had practically a period of enforced rest and retirement from all kinds of public activity from September 1932 to July 1934. I retired to my rural retreat at Baidyabati and looked after my kitchen garden and tended my flower plots and poultry and cattle.

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\*So ended my seven and a half years' connection with the Bangabasi College. I never set foot on the college premises again till many years after when I was elected a member of the G. C. Bose Memorial Committee after Principal Bose's death and was present at the unveiling ceremony of the marble statue of Mr. Bose in the college compound. Before that, after his death, his boys were courteous enough to come up to me at my country home and invite me to the *Sradh* function, which I attended, as I should.

Principal G. C. Bose, Principal Heramba Chandra Maitra and Sir P. C. Ray—these three educationists were very kind and loving to me and put me in the way of an honourable income to meet family needs, while fighting for the country and I owe them a deep debt of gratitude.

The health of my second boy (who eventually, to our great sorrow, died of ascites in May, 1935) had broken down absolutely and caused me considerable anxiety.\*

It was about the month of June, 1934, that I was told by a common friend that Principal Heramba Chandra Maitra was keen on coming to meet me. I thought it would be against all canons of courtesy if I allowed him to meet me first. I went to see him. Principal Maitra was a fatherly person. In fact he was like a *Guru*, though I had never read with him, but I never forgot how I had benefited by his discourses at the Dacca Brahmo Samaj Hall and later, how his reading of the thesis on Emerson with Mr. Gokhale in the chair at the Hall of the Sadharan Brahmo Samaj in Calcutta, when I was an M.A. student, had fascinated us. I could also never forget his political services to the country's cause in the Swadeshi days.

I was received with great love and Principal Maitra, after some conversation, enquired if I would be willing to join his staff as a part-time Professor of English : I signified my assent and joined the City College early in the session of 1934-35. I spent a very happy year under him and with the professors and boys and girls of the college and used to go to college by train and bus from Baidyabati. I remember to have delivered an address on the life-work of Ananda Mohan Bose, one of the founders of the Indian National Congress and the founder of the City College—which was, and is, a Brahmo foundation college—an address which, I am told, was greatly appreciated.

I resigned from the City College on the eve of the next session

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\*This boy of mine, Subodh, had been a great nationalist and as I found out later, had some association with revolutionary work also. He had been, after two years' study of science at college, sent to Rabindranath Tagore's 'Sri-Niketan' (the rural reconstruction colony with its schools and cottage industries) for practical and theoretical training in agriculture and came back after a year and took charge of farming at Baidyabati. A most serviceable lad, fired with the spirit of social service, he had in 1928 enrolled himself as a volunteer in the Congress Corps led by Subhas Bose and carried on his duties in spite of bad health, and his capacity for 'sticking it' was commendable. He worked at the home farm and helped the local institutions at Baidyabati for four years (1931-35); but, alas ! he was not spared to us.

by arrangement with Principal Maitra. Circumstances had arisen over which he had no control and probably many of the Governing Body of the College who were 'moderates' were rather uneasy at the presence on the staff of a notorious Congressman and a jail-bird. It was about this time that my ailing son also left us. Principal Maitra came to see me and my sick boy more than once, in spite of his extreme old age and he was very regretful at my leaving him, but it could not be helped. At the City College I had the privilege of meeting after long years and working with Professor Rajani Kanta Guha, who had been Principal of the Brojo Mohan College (Aswini Kumar Dutt's College) at Barisal during the days of the Swadeshi ferment back in 1905 and was compelled by the provincial satrap, Sir Bamfylde Fuller, to go out of the college, because of his political opinions and activity. Principal Guha was also a Professor of English, learned in Greek and Sanskrit and was the author of several treatises, translations from Greek sources, and essays on the civilisation of the era of the *Ramayana*. He was a post-graduate lecturer also at the university. He recently died full of years and honours, preceded by Principal Maitra. These were educational celebrities of the generation preceding ours and their services to the cause of education and social reform (they were both prominent elders of the Brahmo Samaj) and political struggle can never be forgotten.

I had another six months' rest and late in 1935 or the beginning of 1936 I was approached by Congress workers of the Hooghly district (in which my country retreat was) to work by their side and give them the benefit of my experience. I readily consented. They soon after organised a pretty big show—a conference with many wings, political, educational, literary, economic and agricultural—at a rural centre and they invited specially Amarendranath Chattopadhyaya (an old revolutionary, who was a member of the Central Assembly for a good number of years and has been in recent years very close to M. N. Roy), myself, Kumar Munindra Dev Rai Mahasai of Bansberia (a leading sponsor of the library movement in Bengal and the scion of a very old aristocratic family), Sailajananda Mukherji, the famous Bengali author, and many leading men of the Hooghly district. The conference was a great success ; it

also attracted hundreds of village peasants and was in every sense an educative rally.

After this, the Hooghly workers\* began a big propaganda and constructive drive. They organised a conference in the interior, in Arambagh sub-division (the most unapproachable area in entire Bengal, without motorable or even cart-roads in many places, crossed by small canals and rivulets, overgrown with grassy weeds and inhabited by a population preponderantly agriculturist, with simple standards of living) and took me, by train, steamer, boat and afterwards by foot-tracks along wide expanses of fields to the venue of the meeting, to preside over the function. It was a rally of district workers : the Arambagh Sub-divisional area had been closely worked up by the District Committee and there were about 20 national-schools of small size and the teachers were a standing Congress volunteer-contingent : these had small spinning and weaving plants, to which village women were attracted and a few centres were really active. The centres at Baradangal and at Mayapur were really carrying on Congress work on a considerable scale and had a large following amongst the peasantry.

The conference was on the point of being broken up by the promulgation of police orders. I, however, explained to the police officer who had come up to attend that it was only a *private* conference of workers to which there was not going to be any admission from the public and we had our conference un-molested.

It was decided that I should be taken to visit as many centres as possible. Accompanied by a few young workers, I would be trudging in the early hours of the morning a distance of

\*Prominent among them were the President of the District Committee, Sri Nagendranath Mukhopadhyaya, a very selfless worker keen on *Harijan* uplift and *charka* and *khadi*, a constructive worker and an ardent believer in the Gandhian theory and practice and now a member of the Central Assembly ; Prafulla Chandra Sen, one of the most intrepid Congressmen in entire Bengal, the real organiser behind the scenes; Dhiren Mukherji (now M.L.A.), the founder of the Hooghly Bank and the financier of the District Congress activities ; Atulya Ghose, the astute Secretary and Dr. Asutosh Das (of Haripal), who was one of the most unpretentious and silent workers in the Congress cause and who died a premature death after suffering many terms of imprisonment and founding a medical relief and research centre in Haripal village.

three or four miles on foot. It was a cross-country walk along bushy growths of a peculiar kind of grass which made all cultivation impossible or along mere tracks—and we would reach a Congress centre. I would be welcomed by the villagers and the workers : the national school would be inspected, the *khadi*-work encouraged, conversations would be held with the village folk about their crops and their health and facilities for medical relief and education, the Congress message would be given in simple language. Then launch and rest. The afternoon would see another move to the next camp, whence, after a night's rest, we would have a fresh start next day. Three weeks of this touring were enough to break my not very strong physique : the unreasonable hours of meals, the unfiltered water, the monotony of the sleepy hamlets—all combined to make me unfit for further travelling and after paying a visit to the Radhanagore village and the memorial structure in honour of Raja Ram Mohun Roy, where we stayed for a day, and with my earnest desire of visiting Kamarpukur, the birth-place of Sri Ramakrishna Paramhansa Dev, unfulfilled I came back to my Baidyabati refuge. The digestive apparatus had really gone under and it took me several weeks of rest and dieting to get back to normality.

I record all this to show how brave our Congress volunteer workers have been and still are. They leave college and schools and take up the work of reviving the spirit of the village folk who are crushed under the wheels of the administrative machine, assisted by the corrupt village headmen (Presidents of Union Boards, mostly henchmen of the police and the Executive and village 'sharks'), the petty officers of the zemindary *kutchery*, making dishonest and illegal exactions. These poor folks are always looking for some protection from these patriotic workers of the Congress. These workers brave the mud and the slush of the rains, the malaria and mosquitoes, the inclemencies of winter and the scorching heat of summer and go on doing their humanitarian errands. The glare of publicity does not fall to their lot. All honour to them—it is these unknown warriors of the non-violent Congress who have helped in the building of a New India, surging with hope and fired with ambition, bringing solace and cheer to millions of sub-men who had been living a drab, cheerless existence, dead to all high aspiration.

I also developed close contacts with certain educational and non-Congress constructive causes. Of these the more notable are the Deshbandhu School and Mati Lal Roy's *Prabartak Sangha*. I would often visit and deliver occasional addresses to the Deshbandhu Memorial High School at Chinsura, founded by Debendra Nath Mondal (a Congressman of great repute in the district, scion of an aristocratic family, who had been a keen sportsman also and had in middle life, joined the Congress—inspired by his old teacher, Professor Jyotish Ghosh, for many years the Headmaster of the school. Sri Mati Lal Roy had been a friend of mine since 1921, when I visited Hooghly and Chandernagar and addressed an over-crowded rally at the Town Hall in French Chandernagore, explaining the theory of non-violence and the programme of the Congress. Mati Lal Roy had been an active revolutionary, a disciple and comrade of Sri Aurobindo Ghosh and had gone 'underground'. In 1920, after the proclamation of a general amnesty, he had turned up and abjuring revolutionary ways, had settled down at a tumble-down structure (with a jungly compound and a few dilapidated temples) in sight of the Ganges, with half-a-dozen workers of conviction and courage, and had there commenced the first stages of constructive work—a small school dedicated to old Indian ideals of *Brahma-charyya* and a *khadi*-producing centre.

In 25 years, Sri Mati Lal Roy has developed the *Prabartak Sangha*, his organisation, into one of the biggest organisations in Bengal—with two high schools (one for boys and another for girls), a small cultural college, big residential hostels, an orphanage, a printing press, two publicity-organs in Bengali and English, a Bank, a cabinet firm and wonder of wonders—a jute mill! He has a band of workers, men and women, about 125 in number and his workers in Chittagong (amongst them are some of my own pupils and old Congress comrades also) have purchased a hillock and are running a high school, an orphanage of 250 young souls (very happy and contented I found every one of these former 'waifs' and 'strays' of the famine year of 1943 when I recently visited Chittagong and was the guest of the *Prabartak Sangha* there), besides producing *khadi*, running oil-presses worked by electricity, etc.

They are a close-knit body of social service workers, attuned to a

high religious and moral discipline and lead very controlled lives, every hour of which is regulated. They have prayer-temples, they have recreation-centres, music and theatricals, their annual festivities and fairs are attended by thousands, where a very efficient Hindu-culture propaganda is carried on year by year. They have also small agricultural farms.

I have been in most intimate touch with this organisation, and its illustrious founder, a man of the most saintly character, wedded to a life of *Brahmacharyya*, full of initiative and imagination, spiritual and practical—who has created a band of devoted workers around his magnetic personality by precept and example.

Part of my energies during this period were devoted to activities in respect of the movement initiated in 1934 against the Communal Award of Ramsay MacDonald, under the leadership of Pandit Madan Mohan Malaviya. The official Congress under the inspiration of Gandhiji had accepted a near-*possumus* attitude towards the Award—‘of neither acceptance nor refusal.’ The object was to placate the Muslim Congressmen and indirectly to throw out feelers of co-operation in implementing the Government of India Act towards Muslim Leaguers. The object was laudable but many of us thought, and still think, it had failed of its purpose and was bound to do so. The more concessions you make to a clamorous weaker party, the more they will try to get out of you; and the Muslim League was no exception. Today, having consolidated their position by the virtual Congress acceptance of special electorates, and their logical sequel, the ‘Communal Award’—both of them imposed on a helpless India kept under subjugation by force of arms, the Muslim League is shouting for ‘Pakistan’—on the basis of the two-nation theory. We must reap as we sow, and the Congress acceptance of the division of India into two hostile electoral zones and spheres of influence in the Assemblies and Councils has led to its natural consequence in the broader sphere of ‘power-politics’ in a prospective Free India of the emergence of religious and communal groups as ‘nations’.

I was opposed to the Gandhian formula of ‘neutrality’ with regard to the Communal Award and when there was talk of forming an all-India organisation to oppose the official Congress

on this issue (and certainly to fight the Government also) I readily joined in. Pandit Malaviya was coming to Calcutta and we had a Reception Committee organised, of which Acharyya P. C. Ray was the Chairman. One of the leading spirits in the Bengal wing of this movement was my friend Dr. Pramathanath Banerjea and at his request I wrote out the address to be delivered by Acharyya P. C. Ray as Reception Committee Chairman. The meeting arranged in the Ram Mohan Library Hall in North Calcutta for this purpose was over-crowded and Pandit Malaviya, no worse for his growing years, delivered a two-hour speech. The Congress Nationalist Party was formed and of the Bengal Branch Acharyya P. C. Ray was the President. I was Vice-President and Dhires Chandra Chakravarty was the Secretary. We held a series of private conferences at Birla House in Old Ballygunge with Pandit Malaviya. Candidates were put up for the Central Assembly elections in Bengal and all of them came out with flying colours. Bengal, one of Mr. Jinnah's 'Pakistan' Provinces, which had emerged out of the fiery ordeal of the nefarious Bengal Partition constituting East and North Bengal into a virtual 'Pakistan' zone as far back as 1905 was in no mood to fall into line with Gandhiji's formula in this momentous matter.

I was associated with another activity but this belonged to the educational sphere. There was a proposal—to abolish thousands of inefficient primary schools (on paper Bengal has 64,000 of them ; three-fourths of them, of the outmoded middle-age type, specially the *Muslim Muktabas*, entailing practically a waste of public funds) and to re-group them into efficient zonal schools serving a three-square mile area or so, with better emoluments for the teachers—made by Azizul Huq, (later Sir Azizul Huq, an Executive Councillor of the Viceroy) the then Education Minister. Azizul is an old Presidency College pupil of mine and has always been a nice man but his Government could hardly get hold of the crores (the estimate was several crores, for housing and living wages of teachers) that would be required. So, from the financial point of view, the idea was not feasible and none of us who were interested in educational affairs of Bengal were willing that any schools should be abolished —some went to the length of suspecting that the axe might mostly

fall on schools in Hindu zones, in order to strengthen Muslim areas and compel Hindu boys to attend Muslim majority schools and from big distances of two to three miles. So we formed a Bengal Education League with Acharyya P. C. Ray and Sir Nil Ratan Sarkar as President and Vice-President, Sudhir Kumar Lahiri and myself as Joint Secretaries and with Rai Harendranath Chaudhury, Dr. P. N. Banerjea and several other educationists on the Executive Committee\*. We sent out circulars to district and subdivisional leaders, to colleges and high schools, to Congress organisations—setting out a programme of agitation and propaganda. We waited, a few of us—I believe Sir P. C. Ray, Dr. P. N. Banerjea, myself among them—on deputation on the Minister, who received us with great respect (both Acharyya P. C. Ray and myself happened to be his old teachers) and we had a frank discussion. The thing was eventually scotched. But later on, it was revived in a much worse form in the Secondary Education Bill sponsored by the Huq Ministry of which Mr. Fazlul Huq was both Chief Minister and Minister for Education. This I fought tooth and nail, in co-operation with Dr. Syama Prasad Mookerjee, Sir Manmathanath Mukherjee and Acharyya P. C. Ray; and almost all Congressmen who understood educational problems were with us. But this was later.

In 1937, I had to turn to a fresh chapter in my life, in the sense that local and regional affairs pertaining to local self-government came within my purview and that I had to take a larger share in the affairs of the Hooghly District Congress in the forefront of the Left-wing groups.

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\*Two educational organisations I have materially helped by advice and encouragement since 1926, when I returned from Burma. One was the All-Bengal Teachers' (School) Association and the other the All-Bengal College and University Teachers' Association. In their earlier days, they fought a good fight on an academical front, but latterly, these have taken the shape, more or less, of Trade Union organisations, thinking of and agitating for wages and financial amenities rather than for educational and academic interests, and I have ceased to take much interest in them. But, both have grown in strength and stood by us in our agitation against parochialism on the education front.

## CHAPTER VII

### JITTERS FOR A NON-CONFORMIST

(1937-42)

The Congress had decided to accept office under the new Government of India Act and there were new elections to the Provincial Assembly in 1936. The member from a Hooghly district constituency, Sj. Gour Hari Shome, had been returned after a very vigorous election-contest. I had kept away, as usual, from mere electioneering campaigns : the intriguing and wire-pulling behind the scenes were never to my taste. But he was very ill when the contest was going on. A very nice gentleman, a Vaishnava by conviction with gentle, unassuming ways, he died soon after the elections. There was a vacancy and Dhiren Mukherji, an old pupil, who had influence over the District Congress Committee, was keen on filling the seat. I was persuaded by my friends to seek the Congress nomination for this seat but the District Committee, financed as it was by my pupil, was persuaded to vote for him and I had to withdraw. The manner in which it was done was not very agreeable to me and I thought it would be wiser to withdraw from the District Committee altogether.

I had almost made up my mind to do so, when I was approached by a deputation from the Left-wing Congress groups of the district. They insisted that I should not get away but rather I should lead them in their work amongst peasants and also fight the lapses from truth and intolerance of the Right-wing who were firmly entrenched in the District Executive by a clever distribution of monetary doles and by various manipulations. After discussing things with them fully and assessing their strength both in quantity and quality, I gave my consent.

Then followed two years of strenuous party fights, manœuvres and counter-manœuvres, tours to village areas accompanied by leading workers, who after consulting me, carried the Congress flag and the Red flag side by side. The Leftists had undisputed control over the Subdivisional Congress Committee of Serampore, the biggest Congress constituency in the district.

Our workers made a big effort to 'capture' the District Executive but failed, mostly because of comparative lack of financial resources. I remember even today the stormy meetings we had from time to time in the Town Hall of Serampore, myself being in the chair when all manners of tactics permissible under the rules of the Congress and the common-sense law about the conduct of meetings were used against each other by the two rival groups. I had noticed with gathering sorrow how the party who swore most by Gandhiji often used means which would make Gandhiji "stare and gasp" if he came to know of them. In fact, the running of the party machine is apt to blunt the edge of moral susceptibilities and those who boss and control elections either to the organisational committees or to the legislatures are inclined to be hard and even unscrupulous. "Tammany Hall" methods are not peculiar to America alone. Western political methods hardly square with fine moral scruples or even with intellectual honesty. Politics as service of the people is one thing and politics pursued as a profession or in the interests of a caucus or a faction another. There are certain people who can reconcile both, but I have never been able to do it and therefore mere party alignments have always been distasteful to me.

The Congress, meanwhile, had accepted office in 7 out of 11 provinces and there was a tremendous accession of strength and popularity to the Congress organisation. A big effort was launched everywhere to 'capture' District Boards, Municipalities, village Union Boards, on behalf of the Congress and I had willy-nilly to fall in line. A large group of citizens of Baidyabati—the place of my adoption—approached me to take control of the rather rusty municipal organisation of the place (the same group had been ruling the roost here for 15 years without break and people wanted a change) and the Congress mandate was also for such taking over. There was no Congress committee in Baidyabati—what Congress activity had been there in the past had been killed by Police *zulum* following upon a foul murder of a fairly rich woman alleged to have been committed for 'revolutionary purposes'.

I had to create everything anew : the place has very few men of leisure or political education or leanings and I had much ado in finding young men who would work as my lieutenants and carry the

orders and messages of the local Congress to the people. The continued tussle between the Subdivisional Committee and District Committee made my task even in a smallish place like Baidyabati (with a population of 25,000 only, the income of the municipality was a little more than half-a-lakh yearly) very difficult. Directly the Congress Committee was formed, I had to commence electioneering operations. Candidates for the Municipal Commissionership had to be selected and approved by the District Committee. The District Committee tried to raise difficulties but I simply brushed them aside, for the Provincial Committee always gave me the necessary support and in the local elections, our candidates captured all the elected seats by large majorities. I had an absolute majority ; and yet I was not out of the woods. The District Committee attempted to set up their nominee as Chairman and some of the nine elected as my group, to whom I had given the Congress ticket, tried to double-cross me and took advantage of my rather prolonged absence in the Jalpaiguri Session of the Bengal Provincial Conference and of the Congress propaganda tour I undertook immediately after in quite a number of places in the North Bengal districts. However, the combine disrupted directly I came back on the scene and I was unanimously elected Chairman and my nominee, a businessman devoted to me, Vice-Chairman.

We took office in November 1938 and set about reforming the municipal affairs and eradicating corruption, nepotism and bribery. The municipal schools were improved ; there was a determined drive at road-making, improvement of the dispensary and provision of medical relief, opening of new eye and dental sections and of preliminary examination of lung diseases. The tax-payers appreciated the improvement in municipal administration but some of my own Commissioners gave me, because of their inexperience and occasional foolhardiness, big trouble.

Big things, meanwhile, were in the air so far as the Indian National Congress was concerned. The tussle between orthodox Gandhians led by Gandhiji and progressive Leftist groups led by Subhas Bose had begun. The majority of Bengal Congressmen and a good bunch from almost every other province rallied to Subhas Bose's side and he was elected President of the Indian National

Congress for the second time by a thumping majority, defeating the candidate set up by the Working Committee with Gandhiji's support. Bose was for creating inside the Congress an active ideology of resistance and a body of men pledged to fight the foreign Government, as soon as the external crisis came in the shape of war. Gandhiji was for marking time and perfecting the disciplined non-violent strategy of Congress. The story of the Tripuri Congress is now history and I need not recapitulate the facts here. But I may put it on record that the heroic determination shown by Subhas Bose at Tripuri in piloting the Congress, sick in body and sick in heart though he was, and in strictly following constitutional procedure, raised him in the estimation of all discerning people throughout India and rallied to his side the more heroic amongst Congressmen and revolutionaries. I may say, without any breach of confidence, that I had gone to Tripuri as an ordinary delegate simply to be by Subhas Bose's side in his ordeal and to be of some use to him—which I was. I went about among the Congress delegates from Bengal, Assam and Orissa amongst whom I had visible influence and successfully canvassed for votes. In the open voting, we lost by 2 to 1, but it should be remembered that all the Congress Ministers of the 7 Congress provinces were there, besides members of the High Command—Rajendra Prasad, Vallabhbhai Patel, Rajagopalachari, Sarojini Naidu and the lesser lights—and they left no stone unturned to rally and influence votes, canvassing openly by day and night against Subhas, using the magic name of Gandhiji for their purpose ! The cries of "Congress in danger", "insult to and flouting of Mahatma Gandhi" were dexterously used and the Gandhi group won. The debates were conducted in the open session with force and passion on both sides.

I used my personal influence to induce M. N. Roy to join forces with us and support our resolution but he would not listen. He had decided to form his own group and would not merge himself in our bigger group.

So we came back from Tripuri—sadder but not wiser : for our group had decided to go forward, and not to sit on the fence.\*

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\* After Tripuri, I went sight-seeing to Bombay and thence to Ajanta and Ellora in H. H. the Nizam's territory. I was given a reception by the Bengali

The rest of the story is briefly told. I had attended the rally of about 200 leading Congressmen of Bengal at the Albert Hall when the "Forward Bloc" was initiated by Subhas Bose. I made my observations, stressing that if Gandhian methods and ideas were to be abandoned for more vigorous ones, the Socialist approach, in the biggest sense, should not be lost sight of. Subhas 'sidetracked' this call, in a tactical manner reminiscent of C. R. Das, and had his way. I enrolled myself as one of the first members of the 'Bloc'.

But it did not take me long to guess that unknown to us, Subhas must have been hatching mysterious plans and politics : I found him more and more closeted with new 'men' from the other provinces and when I went to see him, he was as courteous as ever but pleaded heavy pressure of work and took a hasty leave.

It was a little later in the year that consultations took place between Acharyya P. C. Ray and myself (with Dr. Meghnad Saha as a go-between) about my taking up the Principalship of the Prafulla Chandra College, a first grade college in Bagerhat town in the district of Khulna (which had just fallen vacant by the death of the long-standing incumbent, Kamakhya Charan Nag) and after some further negotiations and plenty of obstruction—behind the scenes—from loyalist groups and Government men on the college Governing Body I took up the Principalship in 1939.† A college

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community at Bombay and met old friends and made new ones. The Ellora and Ajanta sights have been described by more competent persons than myself, who am no scholar of archæology and no safe guide in antiquities. The subordinates of my old friend Professor G Yazdani, Director of Archæology in Hyderabad State, gave me all facilities. The Ellora cave architecture and images are magnificent and laid out in grandiose proportions ; as for Ajanta and its frescoes, they are a delight to the eye and a solace and inspiration to the soul. The measure of their grandeur and greatness in artistic representation, is a measure of the greatness of Indian civilisation and culture in the Buddhistic era.

On my way back from Ajanta and Ellora, when I was waiting for my train at Allahabad, I met Jawaharlal Nehru and his workers. They were waiting for Gandhiji and I had Gandhiji's *darshan*, just a word with him and that "beatific smile" that is peculiarity Gandhiji's own—and that was enough recompense for all my disappointment at Tripuri.

† I had fixed my own salary at a lower figure than that of my predecessor in office, taking into consideration the low finances of the college.

Principal—specially in a State-aided college—should be above politics and I observed political neutrality with scrupulous care, never, however, permitting anybody to lose sight of the basic fact for a single moment that I was a Congressman first and last.

Life at Bagerhat promised to be very delightful at the start. I received a great ovation from students, professors and townsmen when I joined and I applied myself to putting the college discipline and the college finances in better order. I encouraged athletics and sports, made physical education compulsory, organised a College Band, put better organisation into the Library and the Common Rooms, brought up distinguished educationists and patrons of learning to address the boys. I was a resident Principal and kept a vigilant eye on the running of the orthodox Hindu, and Namasudra and Muslim Hostels. I tried to merge the Hindu and Namasudra hostels together, but there was such a manipulated opposition from some of the teaching staff and townsmen that I had to throw up the sponge.

For five months I ‘slaved’ for the college but my growing influence and prestige in the district and over my boys and also over the large number of students at the neighbouring Daulatpur College and my intimate touch with Congressmen—also the respectful attitude of the local Bengali officers and I.C.S. men towards me—roused mixed fears and jealousies in many minds. The Intelligence Branch and Police (incidentally I must mention here that I had information from most trustworthy sources that one of my own staff was in the pay of the District I.B. and supplied them with weekly reports about college events and about the Principal, staff and students, and helped the I.B. in tracking and getting hold of patriotic boys) were afraid that I would use my position in the college and the district as a lever for intensification of Congress activity. The Muslim Leaguers suspected I would be a thorn in their path, for I was opposed tooth and nail to separatist and vivisectionist policies. Some members of the Governing Body thought they would be reduced to ciphers in no time. And I found myself the target of petty pinpricks and nerve-racking, though small, annoyances from a small section of students and a section of the Governing Body. I had no

trouble with the Chief Minister Mr. Fazlul Huq (he was too big-hearted to treat me with anything but genuine courtesy and respect) ; I had no trouble from the District Magistrate or the local Subdivisional Magistrate who was the Vice-President of the college Governing Body (he supported me in everything and every measure)—not even from the district police chief. The mischief came mainly from a small group of disgruntled lazy members of the staff who were afraid of my energy and drive and one or two members who thought of ousting me from the Principalship and getting it for themselves and from a very small group of Governing Body members who could not have things in their own way because of my vigilance and efficient handing of affairs ; and they were helped by the malicious falsehoods and concocted tale-bearings of the man in the pay of the I.B. I was also being interfered with in petty matters like lending the College Hall to religious bodies and their leaders, and the matter was finally clinched when a prominent Governing Body member hinted that it was not desirable for me, the Principal of a college receiving Government aid, to lead any agitation against the pernicious Secondary Education Bill of the Huq Ministry, even to preside over the District Teachers' Conference at Khulna and give them a lead ! I wrote to Acharyya P. C. Ray and sent in my resignation in September 1940. Thus ended my 10 months' sojourn as Principal of a State-aided College in a very small place full of very parochial people, who could never take any real manly man's measure and who were always afraid of shadows and eager to be in the good books of officials !\*

A few months after my resignation, at the beginning of the 1941 session of the college, a round-robin representation signed by all the students of the college in a body was made to the Governing Body exposing the machinations of the mischievous lecturer, whose dismissal was demanded. He was retained after he had confessed

\* During the tenure of my Principalship at Bagerhat College, I had occasion to visit Bombay again and Delhi also, as a member of the Education Sub-Committee of the Congress National Planning Committee. In that connection I met Principal Zakir Hussain of the Delhi National College and Mrs. Hanna Sen, Principal of the Lady Irwin Domestic Science College for Girls' at Delhi, and Aryanayakam of the Wardha Asram. I also paid a visit to Poona.

to all the charges mentioned (including his intrigues against me leading to my resignation), with many privileges curtailed.

On return from Bagerhat, I had again the fullest opportunity to devote my attention to municipal affairs at Baidyabati and to the perfecting of air-raid precautions in my sub-area. It was part of the industrial area near Calcutta and liable to air-raids by the Japs.

Baidyabati is a sprawling sort of place flanked by the River Hooghly and cut by the Grand Trunk Road in the middle, with very congested areas in certain parts and sparsely inhabited areas in others, overgrown with bamboo groves and rich in unkempt gardens of Mango, *Lichi*, *Bael* and other fruit-trees. It has an area of about 4 square miles and about 20 miles of *pucca*, *kutcha-pucca* roads and lanes : the people are not very prosperous, with a large body of Calcutta office assistants, mill-hands and agriculturists, it has the biggest market in the Hooghly district—bananas, potatoes and vegetables in huge quantities being exported to Calcutta and many other places from here.

The high school with a roll-strength of about 750 boys and a girls' section of about 75 girls is a school of long standing but it has not much of a record. The malarial atmosphere of the place and other causes, economic and cultural, tend to produce in the citizens a lethargy of mind and spirit and a physical inertia which are great obstacles to any pushful enterprise anywhere. There is a co-operative society which is understood to have frittered away over a *lakh* of rupees in bad irrecoverable loans and was in a state of very near bankruptcy. There is a public library and hall and a reading-room which are a real credit to the place, having been built up by a local gentleman with official and non-official encouragement by a persistent effort of over 35 years. It has about 10,000 books, Bengali, Sanskrit, English,—the History section being really a good collection. It holds literary and musical gatherings from time to time, has its annual social, invites men of light and leading from outside for lectures and addresses. Yet it is limited to a small coterie of readers and enthusiasts. The place is an ancient one—Sri Chaitanya had his ablution in the local river about five centuries back and a river-*ghat*, fairly well-preserved through the repairs recently effected by a philanthropic Marwari businessman of the locality, is associated with this

incident—and has historic and literary associations, and a century ago it used to be a flourishing place. It stood on the pilgrim-route to the far-famed shrine and Siva temple of Tarakeswar, about 25 miles away, and it provided shelter to thousands of pilgrims 'trekking' from distant parts of India and the province in the days before the branch railway line to Tarakeswar was started.

But the building of the East Indian Railway obstructing the natural flow of the surplus rain water to the river in almost every place through which the railway lines have been set, has resulted in water-logging, which in turn is the cause of virulent malaria in endemic forms throughout the Hooghly and adjoining districts. And malaria is a fell disease, destroying both bodily and mental powers and Baidyabati is a victim.

The 'easy' jobs available in the European mercantile firms and offices in Calcutta and in the surrounding mill-areas, have caused a stagnation in education and culture, which is deplorable and during the last 60 years has killed the initiative and energy of the people, with the result that civic consciousness is at a low ebb and it is a very uphill task in these localities even for a man of extraordinary energy and daring to push measures of social and municipal amelioration.

I put my shoulder to the wheel and tried to bring back some of the lost harmony and energy of the people by assiduous efforts. I tried with my colleagues in the municipality to bring more of discipline into the running of municipal affairs, and every department of the small municipality—schools, hospital, conservancy and lighting, roads, assessment and collection of rates—was set in better order. I must say that most of this good work has been undone by the abnormal war-conditions and by the inefficient handling of affairs by my successors.

The 'tempo' of life and energy in our country is still so slow, that I have, as a result of personal and practical experience in many fields, come to the conclusion that alertness of imagination and intelligent drive are still at a discount in this torpid atmosphere. Most people do not like to be disturbed out of their narrow and cramping ruts and resourceful men have often to break their chains against the stone walls of rigid conservatism and slow-moving intelligence. This is true generally of human nature in the average, but it is tragically

true in our country, and most of all, in the outlying parts and suburbs of the great metropolis of Calcutta. And on top of this, there was intrigue and opposition 'behind the scenes' by men of my so-called group also ; so I had to fight a two-pronged fight. But I flatter myself that I carried all really good measures through, though it cost me a good deal of physical and mental worry and strain.

The organisation of the air-raid precautions at Baidyabati was also another matter which cost me much strain and sweat. In those days, certain leaders of the Congress were rather of uncertain mind as regards their attitude to the war-efforts—and the Congress lead, in many points, was uncertain and fluctuating. As a common-sense man and a nationalist, I decided that certain areas were specially liable to be made the target of Japanese raids and were also specially vulnerable—the industrial areas round about Calcutta, where there were munition-factories and mills were fast being converted into arsenals of war-production. Baidyabati, my charge as Municipal Chairman, fell within this orbit and I made no bones about co-operating on honourable terms with the Government for making all dispositions about rendering aid to air-raid-stricken people.

I got the Government to sanction and pay for a certain number of *khaddar* uniforms for those of my A R P. men who were Congress-men and this was something that no other man in Bengal did get out of the Government. The A.R.P. organisation here was an all-party organisation, and I had no trouble with the Government bloc or the local people.\*

Meanwhile, the political situation grew worse and worse in India. All attempts to make the British Government see India's point of view about participation in war-efforts as a subject country without any status had failed. The Bombay Session of the Congress passed the famous 8th of August resolution of 1942. Immediately the Central Government swooped down on all the leaders and took

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\*As leader of the A.R.P. Chief Wardens of the District, I had a long and frank discussion of all defects and 'tag,' in the A.R.P. organisation centrally directed from Calcutta with the then Governor of Bengal Sir John Herbert ; and he accepted all my suggestions about salaries and allowances and about making the District of Hooghly autonomous in A.R.P. matters, so far as training and equipment and supervision of personnel were concerned.

away Gandhiji, Pandit Nehru, Sardar Patel, Mrs. Naidu, all other Working Committee members and as many A.I.C.C. members as they could get hold of, to prisons and unknown destinations. And Congressite India declared war to the death against the British Government.

On the 10th of August morning, I got the news of the surprise arrests of Gandhiji, my *Guru*, and so many Congress leaders, most intimate comrades by whose side I had fought since 1921. I immediately sent in my resignation as Municipal Chairman and as Chief A.R.P. Warden in my sub-area to the District Magistrate, as a token of protest and resentment.\*

In the course of a month, the 1942 movement with its slogan of "Quit India" addressed to the British power, assumed the character of an undirected mass uprising. In Bombay, Bihar, U.P., C.P., Madras, the rebellion was very pronounced—there were arson, loot, forcible seizure of British police posts, kidnapping of British Indian officials, extensive sabotage of railway communications, and communications generally, attempts to wreck trains carrying troops, setting up of parallel governments in certain places, in fact a sort of guerilla war, which partly paralysed the entire administration and which actively interfered with troop-movements and military dispositions. In N.W.F.P. the movement retained a non-violent character and this was due to the presence amongst the people of the "Frontier Gandhi", Khan Abdul Gaffar Khan, who was not incarcerated.

In Bengal, Orissa and Assam also, the movement took violent forms, but it was more or less sporadic or confined to certain definite areas. In Bengal, Midnapore was the most aggressive rebel area ; the subdivisional town of Balurghat (in Dinajpur district in North Bengal) also witnessed the grim spectacle of loot and arson by 10,000 *Santhals* under well-planned leadership ; there were some disturbances in the Bolepur railway area near Rabindranath's "Santi-Niketan" and cuttings of telegraph wires, burnings of post

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\* About the same time, by a strange irony of fate, one of my boys was appointed after preliminary training as a Commissioned Officer in the Army Signals, and posted to Razmak, in the N.W.F.P. I saw him off on the 10th August, 1942 afternoon and began to watch developments in the national uprising.

offices and affiliated or aided schools in certain areas and attempts in Calcutta to burn tram-cars and intimidate passengers of trams and similar activities, which were answered by shootings and killings of hundreds of citizens, mostly innocent, by the military and police.

I was convinced in my mind that I had no part to play in an unplanned and undirected movement of guerilla resistance without arms and that it was foredoomed to failure because of the terrible reprisals certain to be taken by the British. Things shaped as I apprehended and in four months' time this movement for independence well-meant, but leaderless, and undisciplined—it was a rising of untrained mobs and undisciplined rebels, who had hardly any idea of the armed might of the other side—was totally crushed. The Churchill-Amery-Linlithgow clique succeeded by ruthless operations in their task of suppressing this all-India mutiny.

This was followed by Gandhiji's fast which threatened to develop into a serious internal and external crisis. Gandhiji completed the days of his fast and 'survived' to the bitter disappointment of his fast enemies and the ecstatic jubilation of his millions of admirers, adherents and friends all the world over.

The fast had succeeded beyond expectation in drawing the attention of world public opinion to the Indian problem : the British Government was reaping the results of its foolishness in permitting Mahadev Desai, Gandhiji's ideal Secretary and Srijukta Kasturba Gandhi to die in detention at the Aga Khan's palace !

Subhas Bose had managed earlier, to stage a most romantic drama in world history—of an escape out of the bounds of the mighty arm of the British Government from his house in Calcutta where he had been kept under strict police surveillance after temporary release from prison and of being proclaimed Head of the Provisional Government of Free India by the Axis Powers, Subhas Bose's announcements were caught over the 'Axis' radio-circuits all over India and he went on preaching a war to the knife against the foreign usurpation and giving detailed revolutionary instructions to the people over the radio.

In this way a year passed : I had spent it mostly in inactive, prayerful retirement at Baidyabati or in Calcutta. I had taken part in only one public activity—leading prayer-meetings at Baidyabati.

after Gandhiji began his fast and again the Thanksgiving prayer after his survival. I had also addressed the big Calcutta Town Hall meeting held to urge Gandhiji's immediate release from prison.

On the 9th of August, 1943, I took a sudden resolve to move about the country—with the two-fold object of preaching the message of Rabindranath Tagore in Art, Sociology and Politics and of seeing the ravages of the Bengal Famine with my own eyes, in my home district of Dacca in particular, and devising, with the help of friends from all parties, practical means of relief.

The lecture tour took me to a large number of institutions in several districts including the Krishnagar Government College and the University of Dacca. I spoke on different aspects of Rabindranath's Art and Philosophy, and took advantage of my platform to comment on the Bengal Famine and its pointers and to criticise severely the Bengal and Central Governments responsible both for its outbreak and for inability to cope with the monster of their own breeding and incidentally to remind the audience of the significance of Gandhiji, his programme and policies.

I went to my home district and found it absolutely ravaged by famine and pestilence. I witnessed men and women in the stages of agony and weakness of the digestive functions—lean, hideous spectres—men, women and children being treated to liquid, semi-liquid gruel cooked at the great kitchens sponsored by either Mr. Suhrawardy, the Food Minister or by non-official agencies and precipitated into death by such unscientific dieting and feeding !\*

The Congress had been outlawed by the Government. Dr. Shyama Prasad Mookerjee and the Hindu Mahasabha, social service organisations like the Ramakrishna Mission, the Marwari Relief Society and the Communist workers organised relief centers in all the districts. Even Mr. Jinnah sanctioned such a colossal amount as Rs. 5,000 for the relief of the Bengal Muslims ! Over 3,000,000 people died. After the famine, the ravages of winter and the lack of clothing led to pestilence—and Bengal became a shambles. Not a hand was

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\* The Government was still following the ostrich policy and hoping to weather the storm by half-truths, perversions, evasions and denials—following the usual red-tape procedure. I issued one of the earliest Press statements, on the basis of my personal survey, with grave warnings as to the impending crisis.

raised in revolt against this mass holocaust—hardly any grainshops were looted by infuriated mobs, hardly any official was waylaid or manhandled by the starving millions. Bengal was too cultured and too weakened for all that, and the rivers and canals were choked with dead and dying destitutes and the sighs and agonies of a people went up to the Throne of the Invisible Arbiter of the destinies of all peoples but apparently moved it not.

It was at this crisis that many members of my family were attacked with a type of malignant malaria that began to take large tolls of human lives in Hooghly district and at Baidyabati. I had to leave my tours and hurry back to take them to Baidyanath-Deoghar, a healthy subdivisional town and a place of pilgrimage too in the Santhal Parganas.

## CHAPTER VIII AN INTERLUDE

### LIFE AND ACTIVITIES AT DEOGHAR (1943-45)

The story of my two years' stay in the Santhal Parganas can be told under three heads—my contacts with the social-service, educational and religious organisations at Deoghar; my co-education experiment, conducted for nearly two years under very great difficulties there by starting a school of Literature and Music called the *Rabindra-Bharati Vidyayatan* on 23rd December, 1943; and my extensive tours in Bihar, U.P. and Bengal districts in pursuance of my old programme—the preaching and propagating of the Tagore-cult.

Within a short time of settling my family at Deoghar I could make preliminary contacts with the social workers there particularly (1) the members and workers of the *Ramakrishna Vidyapith*, a residential school for boys controlled by the Ramakrishna Mission functioning at Deoghar for about 20 years, which has made big strides through non-official help and sends out boys for the Calcutta Matriculation, (2) those of the *Gurukul Vidyalaya*, a high school affiliated to the Gurukul at Hardwar, which also has developed

magnificently and specialises in courses of Sanskrit and Hindi, with lessons in English and other subjects, and also sends out boys for the Patna Matriculation, (3) inmates and sympathisers of the *Balananda Asram* at Karnibag (in Deoghar), which runs a Sanskrit College of modest proportions, an Ayurvedic School and dispensary and a homœopathic dispensary—in addition to arranging Hindu religious festivals according to customary usage and also recitals from the *Sastras* and *Kirtans* and devotional songs and prayers throughout the year, besides feasting hundreds of poor people on occasions of festivity, and (4) the workers of the local branch of the *Arunachal Mission*, founded by Swami Dayananda of Sylhet, situated about four miles away from the town on the Deoghar-Dumka road, the members of which live a life of great hardship, of constant prayers and *Kirtan* songs, which they believe will usher in an era of peace and goodwill amongst all mankind and terminate all bloody feuds and wars.

Soon after I had an inner urge to visit certain towns of Bihar—Patna, Monghyr, Bhagalpur, Dumka, etc. The tour again brought me in touch with men and educational activities in Bihar, and I took the opportunity also of talking about the poet to the Bengalees domiciled in those Bihar towns.

I came back and began my new activities (after a month's rest and meditation on ways and means) with regard to my '*Rabindra-Bharati Vidyayatan*', the co-educational experiment which kept me busy for nearly two years at Deoghar, the chequered history of which may be of interest to many.

What turned my thoughts to the starting of a school in memory of our *Gurudev* Rabindranath Tagore and following the 'Santi-Niketan' idea was this : after Tagore's death, an all-India Rabindra Nath Memorial Committee had been started (after we had organised a mammoth gathering at the Calcutta Town Hall with Mrs. Sarojini Naidu as President and Sir Tej Bahadur Sapru as the principal speaker) with Sapru as President, Dr. P. N. Banerjee as Secretary and Sir Biren Mookerjee as Treasurer with a view to collecting a substantial fund. The committee began its work with great fanfare-nade, but could not do much of work with respect to collection of funds. This has in recent years been made good by the great orga-

rising ability of our friend Sures Chandra Majumdar (of the *Hindusthan Standard* and *Ananda Bazar Patrika*) assisted by a noble band.

It distressed me greatly when practically very little was done by the committee ; and at Deoghar I conceived the idea of doing something on my own initiative and responsibility to further the cause.

Nothing better could keep *Gurudeva's* memory bright, I thought, than a school named after him, whose main idea was to be the encouragement of the intensive study of his literature, art and music and political and cultural and socio-economic ideas. He had been a great believer in co-education and so was I. As a matter of fact nothing is calculated to eradicate sex-urges and to overcome sex-barriers as for children of both sexes to read together and engage in common festivities and socio-cultural work.

I had been thinking on these lines, when a group of young girls of college-education or trained in 'Santi-Niketan' who had started a *Rabindra-Parishad* affiliated to 'Santi-Niketan' and got together a small library of Rabindranath's books and some other classics of Bengali language, linguistics and grammar, approached me to encourage the cause (which lacked drive) by opening formally the organisation at a select gathering of Rabindra-lovers, men and women. I gave my consent and privately worked out a plan of starting a bigger venture—not only a small study-circle and a reading-room but a real, live school for the cultivation of Rabindranath's legacy.

I did not let the grass grow under my feet. It has been my experience that if a good idea seizes me, it seizes me by the scruff of my neck as it were and does not give me rest till it has been put into action. I have often failed in bringing my well-begun idealistic ventures to port, but the adventure has been bracing to my soul and intellect and it has harmed nobody but myself. On the 12th of December, 1943, I opened the Rabindra Parishad and the reading-room and on the 23rd of December (in barely 10 days' time) I had managed to formally inaugurate the opening of the Rabindra Bharati Vidyayatan at a big meeting attended by over 500 men and women, the elite of the town.

On the 3rd of January, 1944, the classes were formally opened with appropriate ceremonies by my friend Dr. P. N. Banerjea, sometime Minto Professor of Economics, Calcutta University and then Leader of the Nationalist Party in the Central Legislative Assembly. We started with about 20 boys and girls and the number swelled to about 50 at the end of the year.\*

But the difficulty arose, when things began to take shape and some amount of discipline and regularity in attendance of the teaching staff (who were gradually given a monthly allowance all on a basis of equality) were sought to be enforced. We had excellent social functions which were largely attended but gradually it was made evident that hardly any local support was forthcoming, that ideas of co-education of even small boys and girls slightly above 10 or 12 years of age were not acceptable to most of the conservative people living in that sleepy hollow of the Santhal Parganas and, besides, the teachers began to waver and then to go in for more lucrative jobs. Some put me under a great strain by importing personal relationships of a rather intimate character into the precincts of the school.

I toured many places—lecturing on Rabindranath and telling people of my educational experiment and preparing the ground for collection of funds and injuring my rather delicate health. I was verging on sixty. I had put the school into some working order when there was a break between me and a few of my good workers on matters of principle which to me were fundamental. They left the school and I had to import fresh blood. The roll-strength had gone down to 25 by the middle of the second year, owing to the guardians of about 20 pupils suddenly leaving Deoghar, the result of unforeseen circumstances. Meanwhile, the Government policy towards the Congress had suddenly changed directly after the defeat of the Axis

\* I began to cast about for funds and those who helped me included Rai Bahadur Nirmal Shib Banerji of Labhpur (Birbhum), a zemindar and a dramatic writer of some fame; the Zemindar of Atharabari (Mymensingh) a disciple of Swami Balananda of Deoghar and an old boy of 'Santi-Niketan'; and the Chief Minister of the Hill Tipperah Feudatory State. But the biggest donation was by Mr. & Mrs. Alamohan Das (of Das Nagar, Howrah) who gave Rs. 2,500/- The fee-income also came up to something.

Powers and the collapse of Subhas Bose's military venture with the I.N.A. The Congress President and Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru and other Congress leaders were released unconditionally and many of the prominent workers—men and women—throughout the Provinces also were set free. The Congress was just beginning to function normally and everything continued to urge me to close down my dear creation—the *Rabindra Bharati*; and to come back to Bengal. I closed the classes on the 1st of September and made my dispositions and finally returned to Bengal in October, 1945. I returned with the hope to be of some real use to the revived Congress.

I came back to Bengal with the earnest desire of participating in Congress work. In this, however, I was sorely and sadly disillusioned. The Congress in Bengal is split up into so many fluctuating groups and parties that no 'independent' nationalist with independent views of his own could work there. Besides, my dissociation from active political work for 3 years (1942-45) made re-entry into Congress for any effective work well-nigh impossible. And I decided to live a quiet, segregated life, watching, waiting and praying for consummation.

## CHAPTER IX

### MY HEROES : EARLY AND LATE

It may not be out of place to record here my impressions of some of the outstanding men (some of whom I have seen and known) who have influenced my life and ideas. Let me begin with the pioneers and prophets who ushered in the age in which I was born.

The 'morning star' of the Renaissance in India was Raja Ram Mohun Roy, a rationalist and realist to the core, the superman who conceived the great idea of harnessing the science and pragmatism of the West to the philosophic quietism of the East. He fought successfully, against the orthodox *Sanatanist* groups (who were still thinking of resting on their oars on the old achievements of India in Literature, Philosophy and Religion and plumping for the old-world

learning and education) and was instrumental in launching English education in the country with all its natural consequences and corollaries—the gradual break-up of the old, jejune social order and the rise of a new hope, a new ambition, a new outlook towards life with its new stresses and revaluation of values. He held his pen with equal adroitness and *sangfroid* against the proselytising Christian missionary from Europe with no knowledge of, and no sympathy and regard for, our hoary culture, and the hide-bound pedant of the orthodox school with no idea of the new forces let loose by European activism in theory and practice. He was a linguist and a liberal ; he made the voyage to Europe in the teeth of clamorous opposition ; he founded the new school of re-interpretation of *Vedanta* and *Upanishads*—the bedrock of ancient Indian wisdom and culture—he laid the foundations of the socio-religious reformism of the Brahmo Samaj and initiated the process of bringing the culture and learning of Europe to our door-steps.

An internationalist and a patriot, Ram Mohun Roy was our first and foremost bridge-builder, spanning the wide rivers separating East and West. He revitalised the old springs of our Indian life and opened the sluices that led these to the founts of Europe.

Close on his heels, followed Devendra Nath Tagore and Keshub Chunder Sen, who split up the reformist movement of Raja Ram Mohun Roy but brought it nearer to the heart of India, keeping closer to the old mystic religious fervour and the old time-honoured social practices.

And in a sense, overtopping all these three, appeared the Man of Destiny—he who, unlearned in the ways of the West, unversed in the ways of the world, a mendicant and a religious ascetic, had the Vision Beatific and by example and precept broadened the bases of the *Sanatan Dharma* and brought into it the root-ideas of Harmony, Tolerance, and Humanism. The consequences have been tremendous : the gradual conversion of some of the best European and American minds to the fundamentals of the Hindu faith and culture and the foundation of the Ramakrishna Mission with its branches all the world over with hundreds of missionaries of the order dedicated to social service and the liquidation of illiteracy and ignorance ; and a new orientation of Vedantism with the stress on the Life Heroic in all

its phases all through that volcanic personality, the most forceful Indian of the late Nineteenth Century—Swami Vivekananda.

The Swami was touched by the Divine Effulgence of his *Guru*, the mad ascetic of Dakshineswar—Sree Ramakrishna Paramhansa—and he burnt and burnt within and without and found no rest till he had delivered himself of the vitalising message of the Vedantic lore in America and Europe and India—and burnt himself out even before he reached the age of forty !

And the Swamiji's tenderest disciple, sweetest and purest and gentlest among women, was Sister Nivedita (Miss Margaret Noble)—a fine type of English womanhood—the inimitable biographer and propagandist of Swami Vivekananda and his ideas—and one of the finest expositors of the 'Web of Indian Life' to westerners. She was one of our path-finders and inspirers in the Swadeshi days of 1905 and I, for one, can never forget the lilt of her musical angelic voice and magnetism of her features, from which shone out rays of purity and other-worldliness, which were to us like the incandescence of a flame tipped in the fires of heaven !

Alongside of the religious revival marched a band of giants with the torches of Patriotism and Learning in their vigorous hands—Pundit Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar, Ananda Mohan Bose, Surendra Nath Banerjea, Kristo Das Pal, Sambhoo Nath Mukherji, Rajendra Lal Mitra, Woomesh Chandra Bonnerji, Aswini Kumar Dutt and a host of others. The Metropolitan Institution, the Ripon College, the City College with attached schools were their creation : they educated a group of men who devoted their lives to the cause of Education and Social Reform and to the cause of India's freedom. Meanwhile, Bengali Language and Literature was making history and unravelling new and shining chapters in the writings of men like Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar, Bankim Chandra Chatterji—the founder of the new school of Bengali fiction and sociology and patriotism, the creator of the 'Bande Mataram' hymn—Michael Madhusudan Dutt, the originator of the blank verse in Bengali, whose *Meghnad Vadh Kavya* is in its virile symphonies and cadences of unmetred verse and in its poetic and epic quality, unsurpassed even by his exemplars, Homer, Virgil, Dante and Milton ; Dinabandhu Mitra, the dramatist and chastiser of economic and social wrongs, the immortal author of *Nil-Darpan*

(the 'Mirror of Indigo') ; Bhudev Mukherji, the essayist, the apostle of a chastened conservatism, sane, sedate and balanced in outlook ; Nabin Chandra Sen, the patriot-poet of *Palasir Juddha*—('The Battle of Plassey') and of the trilogy based on the exploits of Sri Krishna as enunciated in the *Mahabharata* which preaches a new humanism of an Indian character ; Hem Chandra Bandyopadhyaya, the epic poet of *Vritra-Sanhar* ('The Killing of Vritra') and the composer of ever so many sorrow-laden songs of patriotism. These were supplemented by satirists like Indra Nath Bandyopadhyaya and critics like Chandra Nath Bose, Sures Chandra Samajpati, Panch Cowri Banerji, and by that prince of dramatic authors, Giris Chandra Ghosh—who, for half-century, regaled Bengal with religious, social and modernist pieces and with renderings from the immortal Shakespeare ! Nearer to our own times were the satirical dramatist, Amrita Lal Bose ; the patriot-poet, composer, dramatist, satirist—all rolled in one—Dwijendra Lal Roy ; the critic flavoured with a slash of sardonic humour and Shawian cynicism, the dilettante and polished essayist, the originator of a new style, all his own—Pramatha Choudhury ('Birbal') who had a most intimate contact with French literature ; and his worthy colleague Atul Chandra Gupta and on top of all these, outshining and outmoding all his predecessors—Rabindra Nath Tagore, poet, philosopher, mystic, composer, dramatist and novelist, short-story writer, essayist and critic, a writer on Sociology and Linguistics and on Science (which he made not only easy but entrancingly attractive), educational reformer and builder, internationalist and fervid patriot, a seer and a prophet—a veritable giant amongst men, a builder among builders, a citizen of the world and yet an Indian Vedanist to the core, one who epitomised in one individual life extending over eight decades the agonies, the stresses and strains, the flamboyant ambitions and the tossing fears and hopes, the undying and imperishable fires of the New World-Order that is still in travail and waiting to be born !—greater than a Goethe or a Victor Hugo, greater than any other man of letters that has yet been born. For, not only did he wield a magic pen, and speak and enthrall millions all the world over by his flute-voice, and not only was he a pilgrim, voicing the world's wrongs in Asia, Europe and America but he had also the 'realist' touch of a builder and

organiser—of which his *Visva-Bharati* is a standing symbol—and what is more, he lived a life of balance and harmony, steadfast to the old cultures of the East, which have never found a more attractive expounder and interpreter. In one word, Rabindra Nath Tagore was the finest world-product of the century that is past its meridian. He has been a world-figure, poet of universal humanism, a philosopher of the life strenuous and yet tender and delicately flavoured with romance and art and song, a princely ambassador, the most princely and gifted that ever East sent to West in the recorded pages of history—and an indomitable seeker after beauty, knowledge, Truth which is of the texture of the Divine ! A God-man !\*

His personality, his fame, his work, grew and grew for the last forty years till it rocketed into the skies—and the whole cultured world bowed to the ‘Poet-Laureate of Asia’, and the projector of *Visva-Bharati*, in deep obeisance. Fine as the distilled essence of a rose-garden, strong as *Sal* tree, unwearied in his service to the world’s causes—cultural, educational, political—an engine of power against tyranny and brutishness in all forms wherever found—a voice raised in militant protest in behalf of ‘soldiers of the liberation-war of Humanity’ everywhere, shaming the champions of the brutal force-cult in every land and clime, Rabindra Nath left an indelible impress on thousands of us—an impress of a peculiar stamp, coursing unperceived through the veins and arteries of our entire being, growing

\*And round about Tagore in Santi-Niketan gathered a host of imitators, and also original and gifted poets and versifiers, essayists and critics, artists and mystics—of whom special mention must be made of Abanindra Nath Tagore and Nanda Lal Bose, founder of the new school of Indian Art, Kshiti Mohan Sen, who has unearthed many of the mystic poets of ancient India and the ‘*Baul*’ poets of Bengal, Pundit Vidhu Sekhar Sastri, the orientalist—all members of the galaxy that make up Santi-Niketan. The greatest activists amongst Tagore’s Santi-Niketan workers were Nepal Chandra Roy, educationist, Congressman, nationalist—a man who died in harness—and Kali Mohan Ghosh, who built up ‘Sri-Niketan’ by his unwearied labours for a generation. Pearson and Andrews were the most devoted of Tagore’s English followers who will be emblazoned in the annals of New India as England’s best ambassadors to this country : the gift of their personality and selfless service to India’s cause, cultural and political, is priceless. Mr. and Mrs. Elmhirst—the American couple—have been amongst the best benefactors of Sri-Niketan, which has developed into an eye-opener and instructional centre of rural reconstruction and rehabilitation of arts and crafts.

through the years and mellowing with age. He touched every one of us by a wand of gold, not of the earth but subtle and mystical, incalculable in the extent and quality of appeal. A God-intoxicated Superman, who flooded the crevices and crannies of our mind and intellect with the tidal waves of a spiritually transformed Indianism, harbinger of power and peace ineffable to the universe, and an influence deep as life, a mystery and divine Afflatus, a hypnotiser and transformer, a revaluer of all values, Rabindra Nath has now passed into history, but he has made new history in the lives and aspirations and thoughts of ever so many of his time and generation of whom I also happen, in a modest way, to be one.

Rabindra Nath has bequeathed to us these legacies : his legendary personality, his immortal works in the plural and his immortal work in the singular *Visva-Bharati* with its wings, *Sri-Niketan* and its affiliated institutions, and *Santi-Niketan* and the organisations of international culture functioning there.

Their influence is as yet unperceived by the many but the leaven is leavening entire India ; and in a free India, *Visva-Bharati* may well grow to be the nucleus of a university connecting India, the Far East and the Near East and the Western hemispheres in one golden chain of an inter-fused and inter-locked cultural assimilation.

In education, the man whose record easily surpasses that of others, has been Asutosh Mookerjee. In his hands the University of Calcutta underwent a magic transformation from a citadel of the bureaucracy to an arsenal of national construction. The merely examining university was, by sharp manœuvres and rapid tactics, changed into a teaching university with first-class facilities in and record of original research work in the Arts and the Sciences. The university started its own separate College of Science, thanks to the munificence of two great sons of Bengal—Rashbehari Ghosh and Tarak Nath Palit—who gifted their earnings in the courts of law to the cause of education, and the astonishing energy of Asutosh made the University College of Science the rally-centre of the most brilliant science researchers—P. C. Ray, C. V. Raman, Meghnad Saha, J. C. Ghosh, Sisir Kumar Mitra and many others.

Asutosh did never meddle with the politics of the times directly. Law and education and social reform engrossed all his energies

till his comparatively early death. It would be idle to speculate if he would have joined the politics of a later day, had he been spared to the country, but this may be said without fear of contradiction that if he had chosen to be in politics, he would have been an easy first there also ! A truly remarkable personality—an exemplar of the cult of *Sakti* in his life—truly heroic, and innately and grandly noble.

Asutosh early found out that a programme of mass education could never be realised in a country dominated by a foreign people and so he devoted himself to the second best solution—the permeating of millions, if possible, by the fundamentals of an English education. He foresaw that the result would be the creation of a literate class who would carry the message of the modern world to the teeming millions in the ignorance-ridden villages and thus would be the spear-head of a socio-political revolution of mind and temper, without which no mere town-led national movement could gather the requisite force and momentum.

Thus Asutosh Mookerjee succeeded in building ‘a state within a state’—an autonomous body controlling educationists, teachers and pupils by the thousands. These fed the springs of the national movement both by a positive process of direct participation and a negative process of breeding irreconcilables and malcontents—the great army of the disaffected intelligentsia, who have been undermining the bases of the foreign imperialist domination for the last forty years. He also started the process of vernacularising university and college teaching—a necessary evolutionary stage. A man of iron will and astute diplomacy, Asutosh recalls the German Bismarck, more than any other modern.

The greatest vocal force of our younger days who inspired the fighters and the reforming zealots and revolutionary workers and the most forceful and brilliant speaker and agitator was Bepin Chandra Pal, who in the early days of the Indian struggle launched in 1905, roused the youth and intelligentsia not only of Bengal but of the whole Indian sub-continent to an undreamt-of frenzy of political power. He was in fact the moving spirit of the Revolution of 1905. I met and heard Bepin Pal for the first time in the early days of 1905,—it must have been at one of his lectures delivered during

those eventful days—in the grounds of what was then ‘The Field and Academy Club’ in Cornwallis Street. He carried me off my feet by the surging tide of his eloquence, which came, wave upon wave, in impassioned appeal and fervid outburst and held my young soul captive. He was equally great as a writer and pamphleteer and drove his arguments home. His was an aggressive and restless nature and he did never compromise in matters of conviction. This explains his wandering away from the Congress fold dominated by the Gandhi cult and doctrines, with which he never could honestly reconcile himself.

The mould of ‘non-violence’ did not fit into his nature ; the Gandhian interpretation of the *Gita* in the language of *non-violence*, the doctrine of ‘non-resistance’, even of Satyagrahic resistance—never appealed to his passionate nature. He was a *Sakta* of *Saktas* and a *Vaishnava* of *Vaishnavas* : but the pursuit of *Sakti* in the form of Vaishnavic doctrine had hardly any meaning for him. And this explains how and why the political fire-brand and leader of youth up to 1919, became a political cast-away from after 1920.

Aurobindo Ghosh began as a revolutionary intent on freeing India by armed resistance. His brilliant writing, his silent force of character, his sacrificing zeal made a vast impression but only for three years (1905-1908), after which he was lost to the cause, having embraced a life of religious contemplation and discipline and of mystical exercises understandable only to a select minority. He has faded completely out of politics to re-emerge as a great mystic *yogi*, who has so perfected his nature as to be a source of bliss and eclectic *Ananda* to a small coterie of cultured men and women. His *Asram* in Pondicherry is the Mecca of mystically inclined souls and is, from all outward appearance, divorced from the main, visible currents and cross-currents of the Indian endeavour and struggle.

Of Deshbandhu, whose lieutenant I became in 1921, it is needless to write in any detail. C. R. Das had a meteoric career of brilliant sacrifice (astounding, it was, in all conscience !) and brilliant achievement—begun in 1920 and ending in 1925 (barely five short years)—unparalleled in the annals of political India. The mainspring of his soul-force, however, was the spirit of Vaishnavism. In his outer political activity Das was an expounder of the *Sakti* cult but his

inner thought and life was dominated by the sweet abandon, the loving kindness, the wide tolerance of a Sri Chaitanya. It was this quality of delicate gentleness that drew him so near to Gandhiji, Tagore and Aurobindo Ghosh. I am sure in my mind that had he lived beyond 1925, C. R. Das would have renounced the tangled ways of mud-bespattered politics of chicanery, intrigue and demagogic and sailed out to uncharted seas of mystic aspiration.

Subhas Chandra Bose I met early in 1921, ever since he joined C. R. Das and the Congress movement. I have already given glimpses of his character and personality. I do not think his mind and intellect were ever overlaid with any 'isms'. Schooled in the hard ways of realism and rationalist nationalism, he must have early conceived the idea of organising the struggle for India's freedom by gradually manipulated stages on a physical force basis. And he carried it out in a way none before him had thought possible—making a most miraculous and romantic escape from the surveillance of the mighty Government of India, out of India, reaching, as it now appears, Berlin and Tokyo and getting himself recognised by the belligerent Axis Powers as Head of the Free India Government. He marshalled the war-prisoners Japan had taken from the Indian Army, and the civilian population in Malaya and Burma into a fighting force, enrolling even a contingent of women, drawing millions of rupees to the cause and drawing the unstinted devotion and admiring respect of millions to his personality. He may have failed in 1945 but the cycles of history and its processes are moving on—and who can prophesy the ultimate failure of such a cause dear to the heart of four hundred millions !

But by far the biggest influence in my life has been Gandhiji. Ever since 1917, when the Champaran episode took all India by storm, through the tempest-charged years of 1921-46, Gandhiji has been my 'guide, philosopher and friend'—in the most spiritual sense of which these words are capable. I have been penetrated by his spirit of absolute surrender to the Divine, by his absolute selflessness, by his indomitable will, by his identification with the ragged, starving, ignorant masses of India : and my simple act of renunciation—of an easy berth in the service of the alien Government—was made easy by Gandhiji's example of a life lived in the Divine, in utter

indifference to the calls and temptations of the worldly life. I have never been able to follow in their entirety the misty and mazy intricacies of his creed of non-violence as applied to political strategy and I have never accepted it as a creed. Like many others, I have accepted it as a working theory, very fruitful under modern Indian conditions but I have never based my political life on it. Rather, as the scion of a Bengali *Sakta* Brahmin family, I have always trusted in the Cromwellian principle of 'believing in God but keeping the powder dry'. I have always held and held publicly that we have the inalienable right to force conclusions on the alien usurper by resort to arms, *when opportunity for their use arrives to a disciplined people, not earlier*. I have admired the spirit of terrorists but have never believed in the cult ; I have always admired and actively encouraged the votaries of non-violence in their village-work but most of them have appeared to me a bit mechanical, lacking in fire and imagination.

To the extent to which Gandhiji has influenced our conduct and public life since 1921, history will bear due witness. In a considerable measure I came under the spell of C. R. Das, because and when he exemplified in his life, the spirit of uttermost, reckless sacrifice at the altar of mother India, in the true Gandhian manner. Needless to say, my old associates, J. M. Sen Gupta, Subhas Bose and also Jawaharlal Nehru, whom I have known intimately since 1927, have coloured my life and yearnings but when all is said and written, I am of the following of the Master-Spirit of Gandhiji who epitomises in his mystic personality the woes and agonies of 400 millions of India and bears the weight and burden of the sorrows of this machine-age.

## CHAPTER X RETROSPECT AND PROSPECT

This record of a life extending over sixty years would not be complete without a comparative picture of the ups and downs in our social, political, economic and cultural planes, setting in relief both

progression and regression. Progress, it has been aptly said, is never in a straight line ; it is in spirals—it proceeds by slants and curves, there is advance in some points while there is in other points a retrocession, a downward spiral movement.

#### SOCIAL FORMS AND TRADITIONS

The social life of Bengal and, for the matter of that, of entire India six decades ago was still a picture of some homogeneity—the old fundamental social values still persisted in spite of the inroads of new visions and values. The authority of parents and elders and teachers was still something real and effective and could not be flouted with impunity ; the village *panchayats* still were functioning and settling village disputes and family dissensions of all kinds. The villages were yet self-contained, self-sufficient, organised units with provision for a rural economy in which the needs of food, clothing, elementary education, sanitation and health, of cottage industries and arts and crafts and of recreation and entertainment were fully covered. The foreign King-Emperor's writs hardly ran up to the village ; the might of British suzerainty was visible only in the towns and cities ; the law's arm and the tentacles of the police hardly stretched beyond them. Rural India was practically untapped or but barely touched.

The steamship and the railway were just beginning their adventure of encircling the water and the land with their iron and steel rings ; the country-boat and the bullock or buffalo cart and the *palanquin* served the purpose of transport and communication except for very limited tracts.

Communication amongst different provinces and amongst different areas in a province was difficult and the Bengalee, the Marathi, the Panjabee and the South Indian—not to speak of the Frontier-people—were not yet joined on any common plane of endeavour and struggle but the pilgrim cities and the shrines and the sacred rivers kept up a sense of the fundamental unity of India both as a geographical and a socio-cultural entity. The two big communities—the Hindu and the Muslim—lived side by side in comradely tolerance and unbroken goodwill participating in each other's festivities and festivals. The

questions of interdining or inter-marriage, or communal ratios in the services and professions, or communal representation in legislatures were yet not on the horizon though with British manipulation, they were to rise into consciousness with Sir Syed Ahmed as the prophet of a new Islamic resurgence. The fact was, the Muslim community had kept sullenly aloof from the British usurper—had hardly taken advantage of the new education and of the new opportunities—and were split up into a few very rich families and an enormous multitude of indigent peasantry kept in ruts of old-world and static ideology and economic behaviour by thousands of *Mullahs* and *Maulvies* rooted in the dim, ancient past and still thinking in terms of Bokhara, Ispahan, Samarkand and Delhi !

The sexes lived apart and the weaker sex had hardly any freedom of movement or thought. Even amongst the more progressive Hindu fold, modern or ancient learning was to the fair sex an anathema. The seclusion of the *purdah*, the rigidities of caste forbidding intimate social mixing, the system of child-marriage were still in full swing—and our mothers and aunts learnt what they learnt in great secrecy and often by stealth in their homes. Public schools for girls were hardly thought of. The social and religious reform movements initiated by the founders of the Brahmo Samaj, the Prarthana Samaj, the Arya Samaj were looked upon as heterodox, often as inspired by the foreign, untouchable Christian influences and the rank and file of the people were violently hostile to them. The early reformers came in for a good deal of martyrdom and it was only by 1905 that their uphill work began to bear fruit and the Gandhi movement of 1921 made great strides in the cause of female emancipation, women's education, women's sharing in public life and political activities, till by 1946, Indian women are fast coming into their own, exciting the envy and the wonder of their European and American compatriots !

A Sarojini Naidu, a Vijay Lakshmi Pandit, an Aruna Asaf Ali would have never been dreamt of when I was born in 1885 ; and the Rani of Jhansi regiment manned and officered by Indian women would have made the dead turn in their graves !

The ancient Sanskritic and Islamic learnings were falling into disrepute carrying neither the ancient prestige nor the old emolu-

ments and prospects ; Persian and Sanskrit were beginning to be replaced by English, which had become the court-language and the language amongst the upper classes. The 'upper ten thousand' were being fast brought into the embraces of the British conquerors—a process which has been pursued with unflagging zeal during the last fifty years—resulting in the creation of a middle-class hopelessly divorced from the teeming millions in the countryside, the real backbone of the nation and more or less used to aping European ways and approximating (unsuccessfully, of course) to Western standards of living—an amorphous, denationalised group, whom the Britisher has so long successfully used as 'stooges' of imperialist penetration and exploitation. The revulsion and reaction against this set in four decades ago and is in full operation today. The wheel has now turned full circle, it seems, and these very classes are today the greatest of malcontents and the loudest decriers of British rule and of indirect Europeanisation of the intellectual and direct and indirect asphyxiation of the masses.

The changes in social forms and traditions during the last sixty years have been, from many points of view, immense.

Take, for instance, the seclusion of women. This is now, practically, a thing of the past ; our women now ride trams and buses alongside of men, go to schools and colleges, marry late or not marry at all (with no stigma attached), serve in public offices and institutions, take up professions like medicine and law and politics and are held eligible for high appointments—even those of Ministers. Some of them go out as non-official ambassadors of India to foreign countries and crown themselves with glory and their cause with success.

Take again the question of the superiority complex of the white man in India. This has been smashed for all time ; almost every Indian now thinks himself the perfect equal of the white man in his respective avocation and with justification too.

Take also the question of caste. The privileges of caste have been considerably reduced and in public life and professions, the monopoly of the so-called higher castes has been broken absolutely. The problem of sex-relations has also undergone a profound change with the lapse of years. A steady approximation in education, a

gradual approach to economic independence, the raising of the age of marriage, the gradual social toleration in matters like inter-caste and inter-provincial marriages, the invasion of the professions and of public life by groups of efficient women have altered, for all imaginable time, the balance of sex-relations and ushered in an era of sex-equality, which could hardly have been dreamt of fifty years ago.

But over against these advances must be set a vast change in social behaviour, particularly in respect of relations between children and parents and pupil and teacher, juniors and seniors. Here the old moorings have been snapped and notions of democratic equality have often loosened the bonds of the old discipline, without substituting a new discipline in its place. Parental authority is at a low ebb : the teacher is not respected and obeyed as of old ; callow youth strut about and give themselves superior airs before vastly experienced elders. Thus a very negation of the foundations of democracy—a respect for discipline and ordered behaviour—has begun to show itself. The same is true of religion and morals. While religious sects and orders are multiplying and new saffron-robed *Sadhus* appear here, there and everywhere and enlist new devotees by new-fangled theories and practice, it is doubtful if the old religious spirit—the ardent belief in surrender to the Divine will and Dispensation—still persists in its strength. Moral notions of right doing are being thrown almost on the scrap-heap ; a new cult of mammon-worship, of 'get-rich-quick', of blatant and unashamed opportunism is in the air. This is hailed as 'modernism' of the latest pattern, with the imprimatur of 'economic materialism' and American 'shiftiness' stamped on it to make it pass muster !

#### THE CONGRESS ORGANISATION

And here I might be pardoned if I were to record my own impressions of the Congress movement of the last twenty-five years. With this near phase I am familiar, having been associated with the inner circle for twelve long years (1921-33) and worked on the outer fringe for another twelve years (1934-45).

The Congress is today, thanks to the sacrifices and unbounded heroism and martyrdoms of thousands of 'unknown warriors', the

most organised political party in India. The Congress today has five million members and probably more ; it has enormous prestige in the cities and municipal areas and even in the remote, outlying villages of India. But Gandhiji dominates the scene yet and the deification of one single man—however great and saintly—is bad for democracy and democratic institutions as they are popularly understood. The Congress leadership comprises a few, say half-a-dozen, men and women of outstanding energy and efficiency, but it is a close caucus—a coterie. And it swears by Gandhiji and his ‘ism’ of ‘non-violence’ and other corollary ‘isms’ according to convenience and forswears them also when the occasion arises. This is not a fault but a virtue for opportunism, intelligent and imaginative (*i.e.* realism), is the breath of politics and ‘consistency in politics is’, as has been well said, ‘the virtue of an ass’. But when I find the name of Subhas Chandra Bose—expelled from the ranks of the angels in ’40 and ‘tabooed’ in Congress circles—invoked as a saviour in ’46, when I find the heroes of the Indian National Army acclaimed as genuine heroes by the apostolic successors of the non-violent Gandhi, I am confronted with a political somersault unknown in history and I wonder. I wonder if I am not living in a world of legerdemain and jugglery and if the Congress High Command, brawling out brave words of challenge to the Britisher—couched in hardly non-violent phrasing—today, and doling out sweet and gentle words of patient, non-violent charity towards all and malice against none the day after, reflects the true psychology of the Indian people in whose name they speak—and still I wonder !

I wonder and wonder about in a world of half-truths and misty hopes and over-credulous calculations where you always expect something to turn out around the corner but that something—call it Swaraj, call it independence, give it any name—is still in the limbo of the unrealised and the hopes and calculations are found to have been tricksy !

And all this happens, because the Congress is still in the formative stage—advanced formative stage no doubt but it is still forming. Between the rank and file of the soldiers of freedom and the top leaders, is a great gulf fixed and no enduring bridge, except make-shift ones, has yet been built. The links have yet to be forged that

bound a man like Subhas Bose and his I.N.A. and when that secret is discovered, the Congress will no longer rant and expostulate, and waste its breath in wordy statements and subsidiary explanations to explain them away, and blame other parties and persons for its lack of control over the turbulent masses called hooligans by some and heroes by others, but the Congress will then strike out and deliver its last blow to the opponent.

To me, it is absolutely immaterial, if it is 'non-violent' or 'violent'—I have no faith in mere phrases or 'isms' any longer—so long as the striking force is a disciplined army of millions uttering identical words, imbued with the united resolve of an iron will, and obeying the call and command of one leader. In Gandhiji, India found such a leader but a quarter of a century has passed and yet the necessary discipline, the requisite tolerance, the unabashed faith in the leader, is not visible in the people; and the young students, the peasants, the factory-workers are getting restive.

Other ideas and methods have sprung up. The monster of communalism has reared its ugly head since the collapse of the united Hindu-Muslim struggle of 1921. Today, the unsweet slogans of 'Pakistan' and 'Sikhistan' and 'Achhyutastan' rend the air, and the claws of the Muslim League seek to tear out the entrails of Mother India and other leaguers of other faiths and creeds take up their cue and in their frenzy forget that a vivisected India would be a constant prey to the armed nations near about and even distant, and could never retain its independent status for long, even if we could attain such a status in the very near future.

The fact is, a new wave of industrialism and a new school of industrialisation are sweeping the land; and the greed and love of lucre of the common *bania* stalk the country. The old-world virtues of modest contentment, of plain living and high thinking, appear to be discounted and a ceaseless discontent and rush and speed—the natural concomitants of the Machine Age—are the order of the day. The concentration of thousands in political, economic and educational organisations has led to the creation of mechanical, unthinking 'robots' in colleges and factories and public organisations, with catchwords and slogans doing duty for arduous thought, with slavish following of teachers and leaders trained in the art of mass-appeal

and demagogy. Democracy, that fine flower and fruit of the cultured life, is the apparent catchword—but a turbulent and rabid, uncontrolled Fascism—the cult of the political gangster, of armed hooliganism—cruel and relentless, definitely anarchic is growing up before our eyes. The universities and the colleges, the volunteer-organisations, factories are supplying grist in abundant quantities to this Fascistic mill with unknown possibilities.

The urge of political, economic and cultural freedom that is sweeping the country like a flood these days requires many a brake, if it is to be canalised into useful and fruitful channels for India's ultimate good as an independent country, managing its affairs without extraneous control. The Muslim Leaguers are showing a pernicious example in this respect by their bullying methods in various parts of the country, even the much better organised Indian National Congress sometimes loses control over its votaries who indulge in rowdyism for political ends. The Communist Party on whom some of this intolerance is being practised, has begun to retaliate ; and if these orgies remain unchecked, a time may come when the armed power of the national state will have to be employed against these exhibitions—the result may be an end of all dream of a people's *raj* by persuasion and consultation, by methods of non-violence and the rise into power of a Fascist state, which will replace unorganised terrorism or hooliganism by the well-organised variety, with which we have been so familiar in Germany, Italy and Japan.

The only remedy is a long-term one : a replanning of the entire educational system on a new model of social service and tolerant conduct, a re-educating of India's youth into the true ways of a self-acting democracy, based on reciprocity and mutuality of loving and living. How far the coming years will endow us with the necessary qualities of courage and patience and wisdom for these measures, is hidden in the womb of futurity. We can at best raise a finger of warning, so that the small cloud just appearing in the horizon may not grow and blacken the whole landscape.

The time of stock-taking in the ranks of the Congress has arrived, when a decision rightly taken and vigorously implemented would

carry us to port ; and the opposite, floundering in a confused medley of jarring voices and opinions will land us in total shipwreck.

Nationalism—Communalism—Communism—this seems to be the evolutionary process. Nationalism I know and Communism I can comprehend but Communalism ; God save India from its savaggeries !

And at the fag end of a life spent in the storm and stress of a tremendous national struggle, my soul feels rather wearied and worried over these momentous problems facing us all—for verily are we 'at the cross-roads'.

May we be worthy of it all ; may the sixty-year-old travails of the votaries of the Indian National Congress come to rich fruition ; may the birth-pangs of a nation that is being born be crowned with an angel-baby and not a Frankenstein ! This is my earnest prayer.

#### THE NE'RE FUTURE

And now I have come to the end of my reminiscences. But these will not be complete without a picture of the India of the near future, as I have it before my mind's eye.

To one who has taken his due share to usher in a free India, it is a matter of conviction that the division of India into exclusive zones can never make for national solidarity and well-being ; and Free India must have a strong centralised and unified Government. The Constituent States may have autonomy as regards cultural issues, but defence, communications, relations with other nations, the economic organisation including the key-industries and organs of advanced scientific research, must be under one, undivided control. The North-Western and the North-Eastern 'Pakistan' zones as projected by Mr. Jinnah can never be economically self-sufficient and capable of defending themselves against aggressors and will continue to have mixed populations. So 'Pakistan' should be, and is certain to be, resisted by all patriotic political groups : Free India means *one* India.

Some amount of firmness and courage will have to be exercised and fears of civil broils must not be allowed to postpone advance and progress. Unruly and anti-national elements which menace the

peace of the country will have to be put down in any case. Mob-rule must cease and demagogues and fire-eaters who encourage gangster methods of assault, pillage and arson should be put where they can no longer do any harm.

Those who govern must govern. Theoretic principles of non-violence have no application in practical administration. Also, internecine quarrels between different national groups must cease.

The Indian National Congress has a right-wing safely installed in a position of command but the left-wing, composed of 'Forward Bloc' groups, Congress Socialist groups, revolutionary groups, labour groups and peasant societies who do not see eye to eye with the right-wing Congress is a powerful group. And directly power is transferred to the people on a basis of Indo-British reciprocity, the left-wing elements will forge ahead and plump into the opposition, and may make trouble. Take also, as an instance, the Communist Party. This party has already established itself in the ranks of students and factory-workers and mere banning of the party, outlawry by any Government in authority will not put it out of court. The basic principles of the party, so far as they relate to labour welfare, the relative status of labour vs. capitalists, peasant vs. landlord have to be studied with sympathy and canalised into the service of the poor and exploited workers.

The Royists—the Radical Democratic Party and their leader M. N. Roy,—have come in for a good deal of trouncing at the hands of leading Congressmen recently. They have committed mistakes of strategy—probably their denunciations of the Congress High Command and their policies have sometimes exceeded the limits of good taste and of truthful presentation—and yet, their insistence on adult franchise and a people's Government organised from the bottom upwards is an old Congress slogan and may not be lost sight of, without great detriment to the cause of democracy and the People's Plan adumbrated by this party also may not be gingerly brushed aside as utopian nonsense.

The Congress must clarify its ideas and set its house in a much better order, before it can aspire to take up the reins of Government with permanently beneficial results.

The Congress stand with regard to big finance and big landlordism is still uncertain and the Gandhian theory of the trusteeship of the wealthy and the privileged over the poor and unprivileged masses has yet to be put in practice before the leaders of the workers and the peasants may be induced to sink their differences with and fall in line with the Congress.

Then the Congress position with regard to armed defence—so-called 'violence'—requires clarification. Non-violence *i.e.*, abstention from the use of armed force, may be good as a political strategy and is certainly excellent as an ethical theory and practice; but applied to a State actually functioning, it becomes shorn of all reality. For no State is conceivable without sanctions of law and enforcement of law by penal measures and the force of arms.

The diplomatic and intelligent use of the immense prestige of the name of Subhas Bose—the arch-rebel who tried to wrest power by force of arms through the well-disciplined and patriotic I.N.A.—by the Congress High Command has raised the latter immensely in the esteem of the people. And the time has come for the High Command to prove how far it is sincere in its praise of Bose and his tactics. A dog-in-the-manger policy or a policy which says 'you do the fighting and take the risks and we enjoy, their fruits' will not carry weight for long.

But whatever the immediate or the near future may hold in store, the freedom of India is assured. And in this Freedom's struggle, will be fused, the struggles of Burma, Malay, Indonesia and Indo-China till an Asian 'bloc' comes out, and reinforced by blood-baths and common sufferings, makes a bid for full sovereignty over the land, sea and air of Asia and the Muslim 'bloc' of Arabian States—Iran and Afghanistan, Iraq and Trans Jordan, Turkey and Egypt—will eventually join. That will be a day of days when India with its four hundred millions as the Central State with the other States in alliance, will make Asia and Africa 'safe for democracy' and end all white penetration and suzerainty. The next few years will be years of great significance both for India and China. In China, the forces of Russia (U.S.S.R.) and of America (U.S.A.) are now contending for supremacy and by a long chalk, the U.S.A. appears to be on top today but conditions

of famine bred by the ravages of war and the results of an inflated currency are bound to bring the Communist forces more and more to the fore: and India baulked of freedom is bound more and more to swing towards Russian ideology. In this contest it is conceivable that more than eight hundred millions of Chinese and Indians will make common cause, and that may well be the signal for a topsy-turvydom in the balance of world-power to usher in a new era of hope and fruition and fulfilment for all so-called brown and black peoples.

The international situation is bound to fill any discerning analyst with grave misgivings. The handling of Greece and Italy and of Indonesia by Britain on the one hand and of Iran and eventually Turkey by Russia and of Japan by America are bound to have their consequences. A third world war may be in the offing—and a tremendous holocaust—and probably a black-out, total and irremediable of the Machine-Civilisation of the West! What will emerge out of this bonfire of scientific achievement and industrial efficiency is difficult to picture but the 'shape of things to come' may well be staggering!

Small decentralised societies—mainly agricultural and pastoral with cottage industries and village arts and crafts, with the spinning-wheel as a pivotal art—may well emerge and in that event, Gandhiji and his cult will have a run; but this may only be possible if and when the present Machine-Civilisation is utterly and entirely wrecked.

Meanwhile, we must be content with plodding Freedom's way unwearied and full of hope with tolerance and charity in our hearts and with courage of conviction and activity as our weapon and unity as our guiding star!

And to that end, the inspiration of Gandhiji has been of inestimable advantage. We may differ, we may agree to differ, and differ to agree but if we keep his watchwords before us in our private and our public lives, if we go on, with love and charity, in a stream of ceaseless activity, if we make the sorrows of our starved and rugged millions our own, if we learn to take them to our hearts as flesh of our flesh and blood of our blood, if we

respect our women, and if we have love for our children, and above all, if we do not belie our ancient heritage of loving goodwill for humanity and living forms in all their aspects, we shall certainly bring our vessel of Freedom into port some day !

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## **APPENDIX : A CHRONOLOGY**

- 1885** Born on June 15 in his ancestral home at **Madhyapara**, Vikrampur, (Munshiganj Subdivision, Dist. Dacca) now in Bangladesh.  
Indian National Congress came into being in this year.
- 1900** Passed the Entrance Examination from the Gaibandha School. Joins the Dacca College.
- 1902** Joins the Presidency College, Calcutta.
- 1904** Passed the B.A. Examination.
- 1905** Passed the M.A. Examination in English.  
Partition of Bengal by Lord Curzon and the Swadeshi movement.
- 1906** Joins the B. N. College, Patna as a Professor of English Literature.
- 1907** Joins Raja's College, Sylhet for 2 months (February-March).
- 1907-1909** Assistant Professor, Presidency College. Taken into the Bengal Education Service.
- 1909-1916** Professor of English, Rajshahi College.
- 1917** Presidency College (January-July).
- 1917-1919** Krishnagar College.
- 1919-1921** Chittagong College. Resigns from the B.E.S. Takes active part in the A. B. Rly strike led by J. M. Sen-Gupta ; imprisonment for one year.
- 1920** Attends the special session of the Indian National Congress held at Calcutta and also the Nagpur Session, and is attracted to the call for the non-cooperation movement.
- 1921-1923** In the vortex of Bengal politics as a close follower of Deshbandhu C. R. Das. Member of A. I. C. C. Imprisoned for one year. Editor of the *Servant*

- for 6 months. Secretary, Congress Board of National Education. Takes prominent part in the North Bengal Flood Relief organised by Subhas Chandra Bose. Attends the Gaya Congress as a delegate, also the Nagpur Session of the A.I.C.C.
- 1923-1925 Editor of the **Rangoon Mail**. Attends the A.I.C.C. meeting at Kanpur and reports about the political situation of Burma.
- 1926-1933 Joins Bangabasi College. Imprisonment for leading the Namasudras enter the Kali Temple of Munshiganj.
- 1928 Presides over the Murshidabad District Students' Conference.
- 1929 Presides over the Dacca Political Conference.
- 1932 Retires from active politics and settles at Baidyabati.
- 1933 Imprisoned for the third time for his Town Hall Speech.
- 1934-1935 Joins City College. Vice President, Congress Nationalist Party, Bengal branch. Jt. Secretary, Bengal Education League.
- 1939-1940 Principal, Bagerhat College, Khulna.
- 1943 Chairman, Baidyabati Municipality.
- 1947 Presides over the Vikrampur Sammelan and the annual general meeting of the Vikrampur Granthagar Parisad.
- 1949 Death at his Baidyabati residence on August 18 at the age of 64.
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—and processions and demonstrations accompanied with parties of lusty singers, with Benode Behari Chakravarti, singing in a stentorian voice a song of *abhaya* (fearlessness) which became famous as a popular song rousing hundreds to enthusiastic deeds, received wide popular support; and soon the European boss of the firm had to come for a settlement with us at the local municipal office with Mr. Strong, the District Magistrate as arbitrator.

This success raised the Congress in Chittagong very high in the esteem of the common people and the gentry and was followed shortly after by one of the biggest lightning strikes in the annals of India—the now famous Assam Bengal Railway strike. How this strike originated and how it ended would certainly bear to be retold by one of the ring-leaders after a quarter of a century—when passions have been cooled and the perspectives are free from over-statement or clouded confusion.

The Swaraj movement had been working up a ferment amongst the labour population everywhere—in the coalfields, in the railways, amongst the police and jail warders' and constables' groups and it spread to the segregated and carefully 'protected' Assam Tea-Garden labour. Conditions there, of recruitment of men and women and minor children by labour-contractors and recruiting agents from amongst the ignorant and primitive and aboriginal tribes (the modern name is 'Adibasis') of Chhotanagpur and far off Central Provinces and South India, and of wages and amenities and of housing were appalling. The European Managers had formed 'a State within the State' and were hardly amenable to the ordinary civil and criminal laws. The district officials winked at ugly reports against them—reports even of murder, illegal detention or chastisement or assaults against women or forcing coolie women into concubinage. Congress agents must have been at work, bringing the labourers to a consciousness of their utter degradation and misery and encouraging them in the belief that the white Raj would be liquidated in a few months and a People's and Majdoor-peasant's Raj set up. There was an 'exodus' of tea-garden labour by rail and road, hundreds and thousands of them making frantic efforts to come to Chandpur (in Tipperah district, East Bengal)—the rail and steamer-head on the river Meghna joining Assam to Calcutta and the rest of India via

Goalundo (in Faridpur) on the river Padma (the new bed of the Ganges). Most of these were without food and adequate clothing, and when they reached Chandpur, their funds also were near exhaustion. They had women and children and babies still at the breast with them.

The tea-garden Managers must have asked the Government of Assam and Bengal for measures for stopping this exodus. Otherwise the gardens would have to close, entailing loss of job—cosy and luxurious and lined with sinful living—for hundreds of Europeans, English and Scotch, and big loss of dividends for the tea-garden companies and for the distributors—the A. B. Railway and the steamship agencies, all European concerns, either English or Scotch. The Divisional Commissioner of Chittagong must have received confidential orders to prevent this stampede. The Commissioner was Mr. K. C. De and he could easily have taken J. M. Sen Gupta and myself into his confidence and concerted lawful measures which would have helped both Capital, Labour and the European managements ; but the fact is, he had under-rated our resources, initiative and popularity and was a bit afraid of us 'rebels'. The I.C.S. clique, white or brown or black, live in a world of their own, segregated lives where the avenues of information and contact are the Intelligence Department and their informers—the police reports and the advice of the subordinate officials, the really 'decent' Indians keeping aloof—for they are never consulted nor is their helpful advice accepted by officialdom living in their ivory-towers. And what Mr. De and the sub-divisional officer of Chandpur (a young I.C.S., Lord Sinha's son, who after years of experience, chose to resign from the service and now holds a very important position under the Tatas) did, was cruel. There was a group of these tea-garden 'coolies' who were sheltering in the railway platform and in the railway boundaries ; they ordered the police on guard to drive them out at night and in the melee, several of these unfortunates received not only lathi-blows but bayonet-wounds ! When news of this atrocity reached Chittagong, I was in charge of the District Congress and I immediately ordered a fortnight's boycott of the law-courts (for what law was there in an area where the Divisional Commissioner himself could have recourse to such 'un-law' ?) and the Congress volunteers notified this by beat of drum and by personal contact with the town lawyers. All

approaches to the town by road or river were controlled by our volunteer-guards and no litigants could reach the town, for the river-boats either would not ply at all or if they took a fare, they could not be landed. The approaches to the court buildings and compound (the court buildings in Chittagong were situated on the brow of a small undulating hillock) were also guarded. The court and compound was controlled by the police and the streets—the people's thoroughfares—by the people's guard ; and for a week at least the courts sat but could hardly function. Such was our authority and the strength of the Congress organisation that even the mails arriving from Burma could not be delivered due to the method of practically cordoning the steamship boats off by other boats. The subordinate officials everywhere were with us or for us : so no clash occurred anywhere ; and the Bengali Commissioner and the English District Magistrate were also probably not very keen on a trial of strength with us. For, so sudden and so big and so unexpected had been the rise of the Congress to power and prestige and so big was our following—almost every Hindu and Muslim to a man excepting Government servants and several 'loyalist' zemindars and lawyers were with us—and such was the popularity of Sen Gupta ('Barrister Babu') and of myself ('Master Babu') throughout the length and breadth of the District and its borders that the Government Executive and Police did not know what to do. And truly it may be said, the India Government itself could not size up the Indian situation and there was a stage when the Commander-in-Chief had declared that he could not count absolutely on the Indian Army's loyalty if Gandhi chose to give the call for a countrywide rebellion !

Sen Gupta arrived and we had a consultation and after a week we called off the boycott. I had openly placed our volunteers on the roads for enforcing the boycott, walked upto the court compound and told the police that the court buildings and compound were under their control but the roads were ours to control and I had walked up the height of the stairs to the Bar Library room and sweetly admonished a few senior members including the Government pleader for having disobeyed the Congress mandate—and nobody dared to interfere with my movements or to put me under preventive arrest. The Government bloc never expected such a move—I had acted so quickly—and the boycott, I believe, was without parallel in any part of India.

Soon after, Sen Gupta and myself conferred with some of the leading Indian employees of the Assam-Bengal Railway—and formed a very loose Railway Union without having time to frame any rules or procedure and to collect any Union funds—Sen Gupta became the President and myself had the status of adviser. No sooner had the Union been formed than we set the lightning railway strike on foot. Our plain object was to paralyse the entire administration by a General Strike all over the country (but as we found later, other Provinces were not ready and our General, Gandhiji was not thinking as yet in terms of such a revolution) and J.M. Sen Gupta, President-elect of the A. B. Railway Union directed all Railwaymen to come out on strike as a protest primarily against the atrocities committed by Government officials and European officials acting in collusion at Chandpur Railway Station and secondarily in support of certain demands as regards wages, housing, leave, provident fund facilities, etc.

The small piece of paper on which J. M. Sen Gupta wrote out his directive for a general strike was carried from railway centre to railway centre and after 48 hours, the entire Indian staff (the porters, the menials, the signalmen, the gangmen, the assistants and the assistant station-masters, and guards almost *en bloc* and higher officials like station-masters etc. also in large numbers, also labour-contractors) had practically struck work. The entire Railway from Dibrugarh and higher up down to Chandpur was paralysed and very soon the steamer agency men at Chandpur, Barisal, Narayanganj and Goalundo, the main riverine ports, also followed suit. Basanta Kumar Majumdar of Comilla whose was a life dedicated to freedom's battle (along with his wife Mrs. Hemaprabha Majumdar)—a man of very great organising powers, also a speaker and agitator of the most challenging type (a *pucca* revolutionary)—roused these men to join the strike and paralyse the communications.

Then began a regular conflict between the European and Anglo-Indian officials of the Railway and our group—a day-to-day battle of wits and tactical manouevring which continued for no less than 3 months. The Company-managed Railway (it was guaranteed against loss by the Government of India and that was how it was saved from financial ruin) ran a few shuttle-trains : the Indian staff carried us by stealth to whatever stations we meant to travel—for Sen Gupta

and myself often travelled up and down, seeing things for ourselves and sometimes we sent small groups of our 'boys' to do certain things. We brought out the Pahartali Loco and Workshops technicians and labourers : we had verbal altercations with Railway 'bosses' in the works but they were powerless to stem the tide.

Meanwhile, the Bishop of Assam and my friend C. F. Andrews had come to Chandpur to investigate things and to ease the situation, if possible ; and I often met Mr. Andrews at the Bishop's place and had very cordial talks about terrible conditions in the Assam Tea-garden areas with the Bishop, an exceedingly pious and reverend Christian, bereft of any the least trace of racial bias ; and he and Andrews and myself were a trio talking like brothers on a common plane of humanity, whose only object was to help the needy and the oppressed. Most of the higher dignitaries of the English Church in India are of this pattern. An instruction in point is my experience of the Chaplain to the Metropolitan of India in 1922 when I was Editor of the *Servant* in Calcutta and the Rev. Chaplain had, after reading an editorial of mine welcoming a Church delegation or something like it to Calcutta, called on me at my office and I had returned his visit and later on called on the Rev. Metropolitan himself. He has recently retired and even in retirement has continued to devote himself to India's cause.

Deshabandhu C. R. Das and a small group also had come up and were the guests of Sj. Haradaya Nag, the grand old Congressman, at Chandpur, whose unblemished and continuous service to the Congress cause for half a century or more is an unbeaten record. We had several private conferences and public meetings which were addressed by Basanta Kumar Majumdar and myself principally, with Deshabandhu presiding. Our speeches were of a very aggressive type and the Calcutta *Statesman* was very angry with us. But we were on the war-path and the whole of East Bengal was roused as it never had been and the infection gradually spread to West Bengal.

The Calcutta Congress coterie did not see eye to eye with Sen Gupta and myself with regard to the Railway and steamer strikes (which had now become practically one unified movement) and would do nothing to rouse the E. B. and the E. I. Railways. But Deshabandhu, a born revolutionary, who could sense the reality

and had a great love for both Sen Gupta and myself, backed us. We had exhausted all our Congress funds over the strike and we were rather in a fix as to how to carry on, for allowances and doles had to be distributed on a fairly large scale and some of the office *Babus* took our strike money and then betrayed the cause.

During these months, the town of Chittagong was in a fever of expectancy and exaltation. Meetings were held daily in a spacious plot of land—to which the name had been given by enthusiasts as the '*Gandhi-Maidan*'—and we had to address them very often. The audience was never less than two or three thousand and sometimes on special days it swelled to ten thousand. C. F. Andrews came from Chandpur to Chittagong and a big public rally was organised, when I played the leading role and Andrews was received by that gathering of over ten thousand people as a *saint*: a shirt of his which I put to auction fetched about a thousand rupees, a small ring of mine over 250 rupees and our appeal to the people gathered there brought in about ten thousand rupees in money and clothing apparel for the strikers.

C. F. Andrews tried his best to effect a compromise between us, the strike-leaders and the management of the A. B. Railway, but without success. The position was: the European bloc had realised that it was a revolutionary political strike and not an ordinary labour strike and they stuck to their guns protected, as they were, by the Indian Government guarantee—and we also were determined to carry on the struggle in the hope that other Indian railways and the dock and port-workers would join and stage a General Strike.

It was not to be; and a few of our 'boys' in despair took to violent ways and Sen Gupta and the District Congress decided that the strike should be called off—it had cost us over a *lakh* but the loss to the Company must have been fifty times as much. So it was settled that I should call on Gandhiji at Calcutta, where he was, and invite him to visit Chittagong after his Assam tour—this was in July or August, 1921.

Meanwhile we had scored another victory over Government agencies about this time. When the railway strike was on, we had been served by the District Magistrate with a notice under Sec. 144 prohibiting us from holding and addressing public meetings in the city. The intrepid labour agitator Swami Visvanand was then with

us : he was organising the coalfields at Jharia and other centres and he had come to judge the magnitude and possibilities of our railway strike at first hand. He joined us in disobeying the order and we held a meeting of thousands and nobody dared to break up the meeting or arrest us : and as a protest against this order, a total *hartal* was observed in the town and in all its institutions and by all workers, including the butlers and *khansamas* of Europeans. Some over-zealous workers managed even to stop the municipal water-supply. The notice had to be withdrawn and Syam Sundar Chakravarti wrote an Editorial with the caption : '*Jarastu Chattagram*' (Victory to Chittagong) in his non-co-operation organ, the then famous *Servant*, in a tone of supreme exaltation, complimenting us of Chittagong as having shown to the whole of India a startling example of what could be achieved by unity and non-violence and non-co-operation.

By this time, I had occasions in the midst of the strike fever and its destructive methods (several goods trains had been wrecked by impatient workers who were chafing under our restraints and wanted quicker results !) to hold counsel with a small group of constructive workers and a few of my pupil-workers (prominent amongst them were Sailendranath Chaudhuri and his uncle Nalin Chandra Choudhury) and start a centre of constructive work in the heart of the city and in the house and compound I was then using for residence, with several hand-looms and spinning wheels and a small-scale school for boys. I called the centre the *Saraswata Asrama* (meaning a centre dedicated to culture and learning), organised a small library of economic and political works, and set to work. My friend Sen Gupta was rather diffident about my venture but I remained firm—for, as I told him, after negative and destructive activity, Congress workers must perforce fall back on something constructive and positive. And I was right—for Gandhiji from 1921 to today stresses the supreme importance of the constructive programme and is of opinion that such a programme if followed by the large masses would automatically usher Swaraj. I had a little over 30 small boys ; and my relation, a trained technician and engineer, Sudhir Mukherjee went on manufacturing by hundreds a new type of *charka* which was sold by the Asrama pupils at street-corners and road-crossings and also at the Asrama.

Constant activity, sleepless nights, unreasonable hours and irregularities (this was how Congress propaganda had to be carried on—on foot and on boat from centre to centre—hardly any rest from day to day except for three or four hours at night and speech-making almost every day before large audiences and discussions with groups of Congressmen or political enquirers or people hostile to the cause for converting them to Congress views or giving them directions for work in the villages or removing their doubts on certain points) had made large inroads on my fragile constitution and attacks of a kind of fever peculiar to Chittagong, and a weakening of liver functions, made me so weak that I was advised complete rest for a time. By mid-July I had received the reward of my activities and agitation in the shape of a bailable warrant of notice of prosecution by Government under Sec. 108 on account of sedition and libel against Mr. De, the Divisional Commissioner (I had been rather hard upon him in public meetings after the Chandpur incidents) and requiring me to attend court on a certain day early in September—and with an easy mind I left for Calcutta. It was then that I visited Hooghly and its national education centres, met my old friend Professor Jyotish Chandra Ghosh and made new intimacies amongst Congress workers like Nagen Mukherjee, Prafulla Sen, Anath Nath Bose, and also addressed several meetings in Hooghly and the mill-areas on the other side of the river. The journey to Calcutta had to be made by a detour (in response to earnest requests from some of our leftist workers)—by sea and river from Chittagong to Barisal, by river from Barisal to Khulna and by rail from Khulna to Calcutta. The members of my family were with me; they also required a change badly.

I first met Gandhiji in Rup Chand Mukherjee Street, Bhowanipur, in the house of Mrs. Urmila Devi, sister of Deshabandhu Das. There I had to face hostile criticism from Professor Jitendra Lal Banerji and a few others who were very irate because Congress' work in Bengal in their view had been deflected from constructive paths by our Chittagong strikes and large funds had been used up, to the detriment of many urgent and necessary activities, and I weathered the storm and invited Gandhiji, after telling him the real strike situation and of instances of violent methods being pursued, without our knowledge, by certain ranks, to come over to Chittagong for easing the situation

and calling off the strike. I arranged with Gandhiji to accompany him in part of his Assam tour. I was with him at Gauhati, Tejpur and Nowgong ; and I remember the large gatherings that came to see him and attend the meetings he addressed in his simple Hindusthani (some leading workers translated his address into simple Assamese as he went on) ; the large bonfire of foreign cloths in front of the house of Tarunram Phookan, the non-co-operating Barrister. and a scion of the old ruling family of independent Assam, whose guests we were ; the steamer trip from Gauhati to Tejpur (very picturesque towns these two, nestling between hills with the broad expanses of the Brahmaputra flowing by) where also the audience was very large ; and thence to Nowgong, where I remember how the English Superintendent of Police stood by with his posse of policemen as Gandhiji quite unconcerned addressed the large gathering.

We had about a week's time of preparation to receive Gandhiji and our dispositions were well-made. About one thousand volunteers were enrolled for enforcing discipline and looking to the comforts of the large concourse of people that was expected. In fact Gandhiji faced an audience one hundred thousand strong in Chittagong. At last the day of his coming had arrived and from the railway station platform and its precincts, it was one sea of human heads up to J. M. Sen Gupta's residence where he was to be housed with his retinue of about 10 persons. He stayed with us for two days and they were red letter days in the annals of Chittagong. Gandhiji had a busy programme, receiving addresses (mv *Saraswat Asrama* also presented a very simple address and a *charka* made by Sudhir Mukherjee and some yarn spun by our boys) from Congress and other bodies, the Municipality, the Indian Merchants' Chamber etc., meeting deputations of strikers and getting the lie of the situation from discussions with them and us of the Congress.

There was a meeting of Congressmen and railway strikers when Gandhiji strongly advised immediate calling off of the strike. The advice was accepted and we heaved a sigh of relief, for we had for the three months of the strike lived a life of great tension and our nerves were on edge !

I returned to face my trial, fixed, so far as I can recollect, on the 23rd of September, 1921, before the Additional District Magistrate, a European. Before the trial, in the intervals of my multifarious

activities, during a spell of sickness, I had written a book on the 'Ideal of Swaraj : in Education and Government' and when I had gone to Calcutta for a change, I had visited Santi-Niketan and rested there for about a week, during which my friend Mr. C. F. Andrews revised the book (it was a small affair of 75 pages) and wrote a rather lengthy and appreciative introduction. He sent it on to Ganesh & Co., Madras publishers, for publication and about 100 copies of the book arrived just on the eve of the date of my sentence of imprisonment for a year (4th October, 1921) and I had the pleasure of presenting a copy of the book which was a testament of my political and educational views, to the trying Magistrate at Court, after he had pronounced the sentence.

The way in which I, still very weak, was carried by Congress volunteers to take my trial at the Court Buildings was rather original and interesting.

These young volunteers were mostly my pupils or very devoted to me personally and they hit on a very novel idea of carrying me on their shoulders on a small palanquin-shaped stretcher covered with flowers and floral wreaths like a bridegroom going to a wedding. The spirit of defiance of constituted authority was abroad and this was their youthful method of giving expression to the spirit of revolt and making light of the sanctity of British law-courts. It was a sight and almost everybody in the precincts of the Court and in the court-room gasped with wonder as the stretcher-bearers with Gandhi caps on and shouting *Bande Mataram, Congress ki Jai*, bore me to the hall and landed me there. The police and the court officials kept mum. The trial began and continued for some time ; and I was asked either to execute a bond of good behaviour and offer abstention from further speech-makings or go to jail for a year with hard labour. Naturally I preferred jail-going to any abject surrender. I was marched to the local jail in the afternoon, a big concourse following me and my police escort. One grey-bearded old Mussalman peasant began to weep and cried out in extreme anguish of soul : 'Even such men are being put in jail by the Britishers !' I still remember this incident : for such a tribute to our small sacrifice and suffering for the cause was a comfort and a solace. The tribute was a tribute from the masses—the oppressed and exploited peasantry for whom the fight had really been launched.

Shortly before this, J. M. Sen Gupta had also been arraigned for leading an unlawful procession in the streets of Chittagong and we met as under-trial prisoners in the Chittagong District Jail, where a Mr. Christian of the I.M.S. was then Superintendent. As soon as the sentence had been pronounced against us (Sen Gupta got a three months' sentence), the question of jail food and jail dress and jail bedding (the ordinary Indian convicts' food and clothing in 1921 were of the coarsest type—the food being very coarse rice mixed up with dust and worms with a course of *dal* or a course of uneatable vegetables, and the clothing a pair of striped, coarse shorts and a striped, coarse shirt and for pillow and bedsheet, two coarse blankets), cropped up (as under-trials, we had the privilege of getting our food from our homes, of wearing our own *dhoties*, of sleeping in our own beds). I flatly refused to eat that unclean and unhygienic food and wear that jail kit. Mr. Christian was a real gentleman and he got very flurried and searched the jail code for any special provisions for cases like ours, assisted by the Bengali jailor. But the search was fruitless, for then the jail code and regulations mentioned no class of prisoners as 'political' and there were only two classifications—*Europeans* and *Indians*. Here also there was glaring racial discrimination—the European's food was more or less decent and his kit was also full-size pants and shirts and he was provided with a change of bedsheets and pillows and blankets. Mr. Christian requested me to be classified as European, telling me that Sen Gupta had so classified himself. I flared up and told him I was a hundred percent Indian and a blue-blooded Indian (as if that mattered !) and I detested to be classed as a European : I considered it dishonourable! The courteous and genial Superintendent had to be content for the time being to shirk facing the issue and permitted us to eat and dress and sleep like under-trials.

Three or four days later, orders arrived for my transfer to the Alipur Central Jail. There was an Anglo-Indian Sergeant with two or three ordinary policemen to act as my escort. This sergeant was a first-rate gentleman and was most respectful and courteous. All night (news of my being shifted from Chittagong to Alipur had been telegraphed or telephoned all along the line—the Railwaymen were our men and Railway telephones and telegraph were at our disposal) huge crowds of Congressmen and sympathisers gathered at every

halting place and I had to give *darshan* and receive floral wreaths and garlands. A most exciting and sleepless night thus passed till we reached Chandpur and boarded the steamer for Goalundo. From Goalundo to Calcutta also there were some demonstrations but on a smaller scale. We reached Sealdah station in the evening and I could not be entered at Alipur jail, according to regulations, after dusk. The sergeant could have placed me in charge of the Railway Police but he did not. We spent the night at the Railway waiting-room. My relations, men and women, some students, boys and girls, chums of my younger brother also came to see me. Next morning the sergeant took a big risk and took me to a house in Central Calcutta where my wife and new-born baby-girl were staying with my father-in-law, before depositing me at the Central Jail in Alipur. This meeting was unexpected and it was a great consolation to my people and my wife.

Later on, this sergeant was discharged from Service (and he took his discharge gladly, I was told !) for having done a similar service to J. M. Sen Gupta.

The gates of the Alipur Central Jail were unbarred to receive me and I was ushered into the office where the sergeants were much less genial. In fact one of them curtly told me that jail regulations would be enforced there and I should not think I would be permitted to flout them. With these words, I was taken to a ward where there were about 15 or 20 Congress prisoners, a few of them my pupils ! The food was dirty, the arrangements for the privies were most shameful, the beds also were not exactly beds of roses ! I was advised by my comrades to wait and obey the jail discipline for some time. We knew that the jails would be over-full in a month or two and then both the strength of numbers and the quality of prisoners would help us in our fight for a cleaner life in jail—a fight against racial discrimination on the one hand and for the betterment of the lot of the ordinary Indian convict on the other.

Besides myself, Dr. Sures Banerji and *Pir Badsha Mian* (the spiritual Head of large masses of Muslims in East Bengal districts) from Faridpur and a number of Andaman prisoners (Bengal revolutionaries who had been transferred from the Penal Settlement to a jail in their own Province by the efforts of Sir Surendranath Banerjea) were then in the Alipur jail. But they were in separate

wards. The majority of prisoners (about 2,000) were ordinary convicts, jailed for criminal offences.

The Jail Superintendent was one Mr. Ashe, a retired Civil Surgeon, who was stationed at Rajshahi when I was Professor there. I spoke to him rather sharply about the execrable conditions of life in jail and when he came to know who I was, he ordered my transfer to the jail hospital, where I was given much better diet and where I had the run of the big hospital compound. In a few days I sent messages to my friends in the wards asking them to report themselves sick and as many as 10 of them joined me in hospital and we had a rather pleasant time of it. Dr. Sures Banerji looked after the hospital patients (he had been in the I.M.S.) and helped the doctors in arriving at correct diagnoses and I went about the beds giving comfort and solace to many.

Thus two months passed and we were in the midst of December, 1921. By that time the boycott of the Prince of Wales who was on a visit to India took such proportions, specially after the riots in Bombay, that Government promulgated a special *ukase* prohibiting enrolment of volunteers by the Congress. C. R. Das started a big movement in defiance of this order, with the result that thousands of Congressmen offered themselves as volunteers and there were mass-prosecutions and mass jailings. The district of Chittagong alone sent over 600 men to jail and the Alipur Central Jail was filled with prisoners from Calcutta and the *mofussil* districts. By January we were a solid mass of at least 500 politicals (Bengali Hindus and Muslims, Sikhs and Marwaris) and we were soon joined by C. R. Das, his son, Gandhiji's eldest son Hiralal, Abul Kalam Azad, Subhas Bose, Syam Sundar Chakravarti, Pani Saheb (Muslim zemindar of Karotia in Mymensingh), Akram Khan (now a big gun in the Muslim League), Jitendralal Banerji, Basanta Kumar Majumdar and Nagendra Kumar Guha Roy amongst others. Basanta Kumar Majumdar was placed in charge of the Bengali Hindu kitchen, the Sikhs had their own kitchen, the Muslims another and the Marwari friends had a vegetarian kitchen—the jail authorities thought that was the safest way of giving us some relief and it would segregate us from the common convicts. The warders were mostly permeated with Congress ideas. The Anglo-Indian sergeants (with one or two exceptions) and the Jailer, who was of Irish extraction and the English I.M.S.

Superintendent did not make things hard for us—they were rather afraid of us, of our prestige in the country and of our solidarity inside jail. The Sikhs held their 'Gurdwara' (prayer) every week in the hall where the white or Anglo-Indian convicts held their prayers on Sundays with a Reverend gentleman coming from outside.

My hours between noon and 5 p.m. were passed mostly in the 'bomb yard', i.e. the ward where the Bengal revolutionaries were lodged. Among them was at least one pupil of mine, Asutosh Lahiri, a graduate of Rajshahi. They were really a nice and cultured lot, whom the perversities and coarseness of Andaman prison life had not contaminated at all. Our time was passed in study and discussion of politics and I often read to them some of my English and Bengali writings in jail. Asutosh Lahiri I found the most cultured of the lot with knowledge of politics and a clear perspective of past and present happenings in the political world. Later I chose him for one of my sub-editors for the *Servant* when I was commissioned by Syam Sundar Chakravarti to take charge of the paper on the eve of my release. Asutosh was up to my expectations. He has in later years helped very effectively in vitalising the Hindu Mahasabha and risen to the General Secretaryship of the all-India body : he was returned to the Bengal Assembly from Pabna, his home district. Syam Sundar Chakravarti, J. L. Banerji, J. M. Sen Gupta, Kiran Sankar Roy, Subhas Bose were excellent company—but my greatest intimacy was with Dr. Sures Banerji. Abul Kalam Azad used to tell us harrowing tales of British vindictiveness and 'atrocities' after the Sepoy Mutiny was suppressed and he was a revolutionary and anti-British to the core. Akram Khan was translating the *Gita* into Urdu (!) : Pani Sahib, the zemindar, was a real aristocrat, full of the finest courtesy ; Nagendra Kumar Guha Roy (from Noakhali) was writing a book of opinions of the eminent men in the jail on topics of Swaraj, non-violence and violence, mass-organisation, cementing of Hindu-Muslim unity, etc., and we had long talks and exchange of views.

Kiran Sankar Roy and Subhas Bose were very nice and friendly but they lived mostly with C. R. Das (whose health had been shattered) as his nearest lieutenants and mixed with us from time to time and kept their distance from most of the comrades—though not from me. When J. M. Sen Gupta went out of jail after serving his three months' sentence, he had already the plan of the Swaraj party fixed

up between Das and Motilal Nehru in his keeping and he came often to the jail to meet C. R. Das. A large group had already been formed inside the jail who would support the plan and follow C. R. Das's lead. Subhas Bose himself discussed the new plan with me, hoping to enlist my support—but I could never bring myself to believe that the Parliamentary programme could ever advance our cause appreciably (I have held that belief since 1921 for 25 years up to now) and in spite of *feelers* thrown out by C. R. Das inside the jail, I could not see my way to join the Swaraj Party.

Soon quite a large group headed by Syam Sundar Chakravarti and myself with many of the Burrabazar group and district workers could not conscientiously agree with Das. And when I was released and the *Servant* was controlled by me for six months, it became the leading organ of the *no-changers* i.e. the Gandhi group who did not put any faith in entering the Councils and fighting the Britisher in his own citadel. Dr. Prafulla Ghosh, Dr. Sures Banerji and myself, under the lead of Syam Sundar Chakravarti fought valiantly for our opinions and we had a majority in the Bengal Provincial Congress—but C. R. Das was an astute politician, and inch by inch, he began to shake us up and enrol men from our party into his group and ended by capturing the Provincial Congress Committee. He started his own organ *The Forward*. Before this Das had sent Subhas Bose and Kiran Sankar Roy to me, then in control of the *Servant* with proposals of my surrendering the *Servant* to their control with provisions for my continuing as Chief Editor and writing signed editorials when and where I differed from Das's policy. This would be a grave betrayal of the trust reposed in me by Syam Sundar, still in jail, and naturally I did not agree. I stuck to my post and edited the *Servant* under very great difficulties. The finances were in a bad way—there was an ornamental Board of Directors on which were some really influential persons of Calcutta (they had welcomed my appointment as Chief Editor, as also had my comrades and all necessary papers and instructions had been smuggled out of the jail to the office of the *Servant* before my release !)—but nobody on the Directorate took any real interest except a colliery-owner Mr. Jogen Mookerjee, who was the Managing Director and a staunch friend of Syam Sundar and Sj. Kumar Krishna Dutt, Attorney-at-Law.

The old Editorial Board had left to a man and I had to carry on.

with new men. I was myself absolutely new to journalism and had no idea of how to write 'journalese' i.e., editorials and comments which should be understood by even half-educated readers and which might not be quite 'good' English, the worse the better perhaps, so long as they were 'easy' and were also a round-about expression of views, evading sedition and press laws. I had no interior knowledge of the technical side of printing machinery and composition. Amongst the new recruits were Benode Behari Dutt (now Controller of Examinations, Calcutta University) of Chittagong and Asutosh Lahiri and Sures Chakravarti, an erratic graduate whose knowledge of literature and devotion to me were unquestioned. Syam Sundar Chakravarti was a journalist of long standing but he was innocent of the art of business management and the situation was made worse by his having placed his younger brother (a Sanskrit scholar and Pundit) on the manager's job. There was no discipline in the office, the press worked perfunctorily, the menial staff were absolutely inefficient, the bills were never properly collected and there must have been much undetected leakage of earnings by the backdoor.

I kept on heroically for six months—and though there was a written stipulation that Syam Sundar and myself were to be joint Editors and run the paper, I begged to be relieved as soon as Syam Sundar had come out and rejoined his paper. I never received more than 50 per cent of my stipulated allowances and in spite of suggestions from friends, never tried to recover the outstanding amounts. Syam Sundar appreciated this attitude of mine as long as he lived. He managed to keep the paper going for a few years more, by bringing in financiers from amongst landlord magnates and others and then had to suspend publication.

I was without a job and without any resources from February 1923, when I resigned from the *Servant*. At the instance of my friend Dr. Prafulla Ghosh, I had accepted the post of the Secretary of the Congress Board of National Education, which had about a hundred 'national' schools under its control throughout the province, when I was editor of the *Servant*. Dr. Ghosh pressed upon me a small allowance of Rs. 75/- p.m. for this work—but it irked me to accept even this money from the Congress, for as I toured about, I found many of the so-called 'national' schools in a moribund

condition and local financial support also meagre. I wanted at least half-a-lakh a year to keep them going and the response I got from richer people would not work up to even ten thousand! So I had to cast about for other means of honourable living, but of this later on.

The most outstanding event of my tenure of office as Chief Editor of the *Servant* (Sept. 1922 to February 1923) was the publicity of and financing relief for the devastating North Bengal floods, when two men came into prominence as relief organisers—Subhas Bose and Satis Chandra Das Gupta. My organ did good work in giving publicity. I issued an appeal to our subscribers through the paper and could collect about 20 thousand rupees from all over India and sent out a special relief party to certain flooded areas with these funds. Sir P. C. Ray was the President of the Central Relief Committee and Satis Das Gupta, his favourite pupil and co-worker for many years in the Bengal Chemical and Pharmaceutical Works, got a large amount out of these 'central' funds and organised permanent relief-centres working through charka-spinning, husking of paddy, pressing of oil and other small-scale village industries out of which has developed his *Khadi-Pratisthan*, a biggish cottage-industry organisation with branches all over Bengal, run on practical business lines and which has been employing a large number of salesmen and launched out into publications of Congress literature and manufacture and distribution of simple, cheap remedies for rural areas. The *Khadi-Pratisthan* has a very picturesque location covering possibly 30 acres of land at Sodepur on the B. & A. Railway, only 10 miles from Calcutta and Satis Chandra Das Gupta, his devoted wife and his younger brother have concentrated all their energies and used up all their private resources on this beneficial work.

The next big event was the Gaya Congress session. The President-elect was Deshabandhu Das. There was a big assembly of delegates—for there would be a trial of strength between the two wings of the Congress—the 'Pro-changers' (i. e. the Swarajists—the believers in Parliamentary action) and the 'No-changers' (i. e. the believers in persistence in non-co-operation and civil resistance). Both wings marshalled their strength and the leader of the *no-changers* was C. Rajagopalachari. The irony of the whole episode now, at the lapse of almost a quarter century, appears to me to be that C. R. became

a firm believer in parliamentary and constitutional activity later and contested elections and accepted office in Madras as Chief Minister and was probably the most successful of the Congress 'Premiers' in India. C. R. Das was quickly joined by the entire group of Bengal revolutionaries of both the *Jugantar* and *Anusilan* parties and his principal lieutenant Subhas Chandra Bose twenty years later in 1942-45 organised the liberation army (the I.N.A.) and fought campaigns against the British and became Head of the Provisional Government of Free India ! And the entire episode can bear only one explanation that the Bengal revolutionaries knew what they were about, after closed conferences with Das and Subhas, and found in the great leader and his right-hand lieutenant men after their own heart, bent upon the capture of power.

I naturally took a big part in the deliberations at Gaya : my views were widely known through the columns of the *Servant* which even then was the principal organ of Gandhian non-violence and non-co-operation by stages and I was, by that time, a pretty well-known and popular figure in Bengal. But the Swarajya Party was very solidly organised and our party was a rather loose formation of left-wingers like myself and many others and constructive workers and right-wing followers of Gandhiji to whom violence, i.e., resistance by arms under any conditions was ban and anathema and who made a fetish of Gandhiji's ideology. I remember to have put a straight question to Das at the Gaya Session—'If he and his party were returned in strength, more or less throughout the provinces, would he and the party after going into the opposition in the Councils and after presenting demands for immediate Swaraj to the British Government, constitute themselves like Irish Sinn Feiners, into a government and seek to run a parallel government in the country ?' Das, astute lawyer that he was, side-tracked the issue and did not give a straight reply. Our leader Rajagopalachari had great debating abilities but was no match for Das's virile and aggressive personality. So we, the no-changers lost and the honours of the field all went to Das and his party. I was a no-changer, because I was a revolutionary by temperament and previous association and believer in 'Direct Action' methods, non-violent by preference, even violent, if the need arose. I have never been a believer in non-violence as a political creed,

though I personally dislike violence of any description in private or social life.

I believe it was soon after the Gaya Session in December 1922 that I was approached by Subhas Bose and Kiran Sankar Roy about the turn-over of the *Servant* to their Party under C. R. Das's inspiration. I have already told the story of my refusal.

So having broken away from the *Servant*, and witnessing from day to day how the No-changer Party could offer no programme (Gandhiji had been imprisoned for six years after the famous trial which was held after he had suspended the movement consequent on the mob-violence at Chauri-Chaura in U.P. and the really virile leaders—C. R. Das, Moti Lal Nehru, Lajpat Rai, N. C. Kelkar were in the opposite camp—and there was none to lead the Gandhi group into effective action that could capture the popular imagination) and was settling down to spinning and mere social service activity, I felt it would be better for me to withdraw from Bengal politics for a time.

I was a member of the All-India Congress Committee and an independent in the ranks of Bengal Congressmen and I was respected in both camps, for I was nobody's parasite and looked at things and measures by my personal yard-measure. I had been to Nagpur to attend a meeting of the A.I.C.C. some time in April 1923. There I met the Burma member Mr. Madanjit who enquired what I was actually doing. I truthfully replied that I was doing nothing and the atmosphere of Bengal politics was not very agreeable to me and that I longed to be away and go where I could be useful, without any violence to my conscience.

It was then that he suggested that the Editor of the *Rangoon Mail* was in jail and that the Board of Directors of the paper were not agreeable to have him back on the journal (it was a tri-weekly nationalist organ financed and controlled by Indians in Burma) and I might take up the job. The Chairman of the Board was Mr. J. R. Das, Bar.-at-Law, a cousin of C. R. Das and he was a nice man. So I wired to Mr. J. R. Das (who later became a High Court Judge in Rangoon and has been dead for some years now) giving my references and he sent me, after enquiries and some negotiations, a letter of appointment. The emoluments were not very high but was

just enough for the upkeep of my family at Rangoon which was a much dearer place than Calcutta.

There had been meanwhile one or two ugly incidents in Bengal, perpetrated by Government agents and the most sensational of these had been the *Charmaniar* (a *char-land* in Faridpur district) incident of a police force having looted an entire village and committed rape on women and other atrocities. The Bengal Congress (it was dominated by the Swarajists) formed immediately a Committee of Enquiry and I was the only man from the minority group that was put on it. Sen Gupta and Azad and Subhas and Kiran Sankar were always fond of me and had confidence in my impartiality and courage of conviction. J. M. Sen Gupta was the Chairman and the leading men on the Executive of the Faridpur District Congress Committee accompanied us. We were housed in boats on the river and took evidence which was fully recorded, the recorder being Sj. Nagendra Nath Sen, the non-co-operating lawyer and leader of the Khulna District Congress.

The findings were on several counts against the police force. The report was also being prepared. I had to leave for Rangoon before it was ready. Eventually, the Government of Bengal as usual, took no open official action on it, though secret 'departmental' action might have been taken against certain policemen.

But meanwhile C. R. Das marched from strength to strength, making an alliance with Bengal Muslims at the Provincial Conference at Serajganj, through Muslim comrades like Maulana Akram Khan, on certain terms which roused the ire of a large number of the Hindu middle-class elements and he prepared to capture the Corporation of Calcutta which by the efforts and diplomatic courage of Surendra-nath Banerjea, who was then really the leading member of the Bengal Ministry, had been thrown open to a popular electorate with provision for a very real measure of freedom from Government control. Das also began a tearing, raging campaign to win the Council elections.

#### IN BURMA

I had in the meantime crossed over to Rangoon in May, 1923 ; a few months later my wife and children joined me there. I was

more or less a comparative stranger in Burma. The Headmaster of the Bengal Academy—the High English School for Bengali boys—Mohit Kumar Mukherji, a member of the Brahmo Samaj and a son-in-law of Pundit Sitanath Tattva-bhusan (a veteran of the Bengal Brahmo Samaj and a very illustrious philosophical and theological scholar) had been known to me at Giridih and at Santi-niketan during my visits and Professor Saroje Sen, who taught History in the Missionary college at Rangoon (the only non-official college in Burma)—the Judson College—was a man of my village and an ex-student of the Calcutta Presidency College. These were the only two gentlemen who knew me personally, besides my Gujarati Congress friend—Mr. Madanjit.

In the course of two or three months, however, I became a *persona grata* with all leading members of the Indian community at Rangoon,—Bengalee, Gujarati, Panjabi, South Indians, Marathi, orthodox Hindus, members and monks of the Ramkrishna Mission, Brahmos, Arya Samajists, Muslims. There was a large contingent of Chittagong Muslims at Rangoon and they rallied round me at once—was I not the man who with J. M. Sen Gupta had led the Chittagong movement in 1921? Then in a short while, I came in touch with the leading social service workers in both the Y.M.C.A.'s (Indian and European), with the professors and students of the Rangoon University College and the Judson College and with Burmese leaders and journalists. The link between these latter and myself was first my organ *The Rangoon Mail* which I soon used as a lever for inter-racial approximation and as a forum of public opinion, ventilating the legitimate grievances of all communities and classes, not barring Government servants and as a propaganda-sheet for the publicisation of all-India Congress news and views and of Bengal politics in particular.

Mr. Madanjit introduced me to Rev. U. Ottama, the undisputed leader of Burma of those times—a man of Arakanese extraction who had taken holy orders and was a Buddhist *Phoongyi* or monk. He had travelled widely in Bengal and many parts of India and also in Japan and was a great believer in Indo-Burmese solidarity. Ottama became an intimate friend—he had known me by repute—and he enlisted me and my organ in support of his *Wanthanu Party*, the

leftwing movement in Burma, which had made great headway amongst the virile elements of the Burmese people—the very clever and active women of Burma and the thousands of Burmese monks, who were both a power in the land. The Burmese women controlled not only their households and husbands (most of whom were hangers-on of their spouses being traditionally lazy, happy-go-lucky do-nothings) and dominated the Burmese section of the business in the land ; they were also violently anti-British. Their unrestricted social freedom, their elastic laws of marriage and divorce, their economic independence and general fund of common sense and high spirits were matters which might well be imitated in their finer aspects by women in our country. The *Phoongyis*—the monks exercised great influence, by reason of their control over the monasteries and *Pagodas* littered in thousands all over Burma and lending the country such a picturesqueness, and by virtue of the fact that in their monasteries they gave free education to Burma's boys and girls. They by their religious and tempered lives were the natural instructors of the people and, as in every country, the women were amenable to their religious persuasions. All *Phoongyis*, of course, were not of exemplary character : there was a substantial element of riff-raff and 'goondas' also masquerading in monkish robes, but even those could easily be pressed into the patriotic cause—they were also no lovers of the foreigner. At the same time, mostly under foreign inspiration, a section of Burmans was being organised into an anti-*kala* (anti-Indian) group, violent and explosive in their detestation of Indians. Such feelings were to inflame the easy-going, lazy Burman who fast was losing in life's hard battle in the labour front. The port of Rangoon with its jetties and warehouses on the Rangoon river, was full of South Indian porters and coolies, accustomed to hard labour. The mills and factories, the oil-fields were run by Indian labour mostly, they being more hard-working and responsible. The small shopkeepers all over Burma were almost all South Indians, Malabar *Chulia* Muslims. The land had passed by slow but inevitable processes into the hands of the South Indian and other Indian capitalists. The banking was controlled by the *Chettiyars*, and offices of Government were held by Europeans, Anglo-Burmans, and Indians from all the provinces (South Indians and Bengalis in

preponderant numbers, with Panjabis and Marathis thrown in). Big business was either in the hands of the European merchants or Gujaratis, Nakhodas and Marwaris.

The Burman was just beginning to wake up by 1923. The year 1921 had witnessed also in Burma a big anti-British movement, which had been very adroitly manœuvred into an easier position by the astute Governor—Sir Harcourt Butler—who affected Burmese ways and was reputed to be very fond of Burmese ladies ! The national school movement was a great success in Burma and by clever manipulation, these schools were incorporated into the administrative system on a more or less autonomous basis : the Rangoon University was being organised and European and Indian lecturers of repute were being marshalled (with a small sprinkling of Burmans also) and the core of an intelligentsia was being created with the very evident purpose of being annexed to the British system by superior jobs and facilities. A Burmese Press had also sprung up—the journals conducted in English were third-rate performances, but some of the Burmese language papers were powerful and voiced nationalist causes and views with vigour, if not with comprehensive knowledge or elegance,

A movement had also sprung up, looking with disfavour on mixed marriages—whether with Europeans, Indians or Chinese. A class of people had come into being by these marriages whose loyalty to the 'Burma for Burmans' slogan was rather unsure—the *Zerbadis* (of Burmese and Muslim parentage) and the Sino-Burmans (of mixed Chinese and Burmese parentage). As for the Anglo-Burmans, they belonged body and soul to the British. The Chinese had hit on a very original idea—they married Burmese wives, packed the male offspring to China for education (then they became Chinese citizens), keeping only the females in Burma. This had its depressing, denationalising results. The most active crusaders in this cause were the Burmese women. Temperance movements had also sprung up and for these Christian Missions and the better type of Burmese monks and women were responsible—the average Burman was fond of alcoholic liquors and beverages. The dominant factor in Burmese life, as I could sense it during my two years' travels and experiences, was the Buddhistic doctrine of impermanence, which was sapping the seriousness of all endeavour and encouraging habits of thriftlessness

and indolence. This was being impinged upon by modernistic forces of virility and activism, imported by both the European and the Indian elements into Burmese soil. I found two schools of thought in Burma—one very much tied to Indian nationalist leadership and ways, and the other more or less anglicised and imitative of European ways but not assimilative. A third school also was shaping then—a school of Burmese renaissance and rehabilitation of old Burmese values and virtues—aggressively anti-European and aggressively anti-Indian also. It is the last, the third school, which seems to have come into play during the years of the World War II and which was responsible for the preliminary British 'debacle' before the Japanese onslaught and which, to my mind, is bound surely to re-assert itself after some time, despite British attempts at regaining control. Rev. U. Ottama tried all his life to harmonise the first and third ideologies but he did not live to see the fruition of his dreams. He was a most fearless revolutionary, a real man of the people, wedded to direct action tactics ; and he was a staunch believer in the urgency and necessity of Indo-Burmese unity without which the freedom of neither country could be achieved. I used the *Rangoon Mail* to popularise this concept and to infect the Burmese English-educated youth and politicians with the ideas dominating the Indian National Congress. I worked and spoke by the side of Ottama on many platforms ; I took a rather leading part in popularising and explaining the movement against capitation-taxes launched by Ottama and other Burmese left-wingers in 1924. But I was ever on my guard : I would not easily lend myself to victimisation by the Government of Burma, for I considered myself an emissary from India to Burma and I managed to avoid imprisonment, though the Intelligence Department was aware of my affiliations and kept vigilant watch on my pronouncements and activities by a set of special informers.

Such was Burma when I was there for two years (1923-25). My popularity in Rangoon and Burma grew quickly : in six or eight months' time, I had real control of even the turbulent *Phoongyi* political elements, who respected me. I was very much in request, addressing Y.M.C.A. people, social gatherings of Indians, lecturing to University Unions, addressing Arya Samajist celebrations in respect of their

founder, Swami Dayanand Saraswati, speaking before Burmese gatherings in English with my speeches translated into the Burmese language, encouraging and addressing literary meetings, organising receptions for eminent art-lecturers, organising the Hindu elements of Burma for social purposes and last, but not least, popularising by precept and example the Gandhian ways of political warfare.

During my stay in Burma, there were several Indian movements which I publicised effectively. One was the Tarakeswar *Satyagraha* movement in Hooghly district led by C. R. Das (it was a movement for dispossession of the oppressive and lecherous *Mohunt* of Tarakeswar from his lands and property and control of the Tarakeswar temple, famed all over Bengal as a holy place of pilgrimage and for converting these to national use under Congress direction and it succeeded in the first object and did not in the latter, for the time was not yet), of which details were supplied to me by the news agencies, but principally by my friend Dr. J. M. Das Gupta, one of C. R. Das's staunchest lieutenants, a doctor with a big practice and a heroic fighter in the Congress ranks for long years and a Congress member of the Bengal Council from the Burrabazar constituency who had come to Rangoon and established contacts with Indian and Burmese leaders of thought and action. The other was the *Guru-ka-bagh movement* of militant Sikhs for dispossessing the *Mohunt* of *Nankana Sahib*—a Gurdwara of great renown and resources—a strictly non-violent movement where the Sikhs displayed courage of the finest complexion against heavy odds. The third was the South African Boer Government's ungenerous legislation against Indians, in direct contravention of the Gandhi-Smuts agreement : I could enlist the active support of the Burmese leaders and press in the cause and that was something.

In Bengal, meanwhile, events were speeding. C. R. Das had captured the Corporation of Calcutta, lock, stock and barrel. He was elected the first Mayor ; and the Corporation appointed Subhas Bose as its Chief Executive Officer, a non-co-operating Muslim lawyer and sufferer from Noakhali as the Deputy Chief, Subhas's friend Kshitis Prosad Chattopadhyaya as its Education Officer and had revolutionised the entire administration including the fundamental principles as well as the day-to-day routine practice. The seizure of

the Corporation gave the Swarajists a trump card which they used with great effect against the Government and to strengthen the coffers of the party. In the Bengal Council also, the party compelled a Ministry to resign—C. R. Das very ill, being carried on a stretcher to the Council hall—giving a deathblow to dyarchy and paving the way for the unified system of provincial autonomy. The Government of Bengal acted quickly and vindictively. It sent into externment in Burma a large number of C. R. Das's lieutenants—Subhas Bose, Professor Jyotish Ghosh, many members of the Jugantar group, Bhupendra Kumar Dutt, Jibnalal Chatterji and many others. They were landed in Rangoon for transportation to the Mandalay fortress and distant jails in the interior and the Burma Government were at their wits' end to discover how I, the *Rangoon Mail* Editor, could get news of their landing almost at once (it was a closely guarded secret ! ) and publish a special edition of the *Mail* giving the news. I plainly confess today that Destiny was working in our favour and in assistance of our cause, for, the news was whispered to me in broad daylight in my office-room by a servant of the Government. I tried my best to serve my friends, Subhas Bose and others by publishing news about them, demanding redress of their grievances and the Government responded and did take some measures in response.

The other *scoop* was the publication of an open letter addressed to the Secretary of State for India by Bhupendra Kumar Dutt and other ex-ternees from a far-off jail in the remote interior of Burma—containing serious allegations of the India Government agencies having provoked bloodshed and murders by agent provocateurs to split the revolutionary groups and create loopholes for punishing them for activities which were never theirs. This I received privately—and having had typed copies made in my office—I sent copies to C. R. Das's paper *Forward*; and after its publication in the *Forward*, I reprinted the letter in my columns ! The publicising was effective and nobody could father anything on me !

Deshabandhu Das had sent an agent for the sale of shares in the 'Forward Publishing Ltd.' in Rangoon and other important Burma towns : he approached me for assistance. I had to tell him that I could give him all assistance (though I wanted finance for my paper

the *Rangoon Mail* also badly) most gladly as soon as Deshabandhu personally wrote to me. Das wrote to me a personal letter requesting me to help his agent and I used my personal influence and the influence of my organ for the cause of the *Forward* which was, I was told, of real assistance in pushing the sale of shares amongst members of the Indian community.

The other cause which also I could materially help was the raising of funds for the *Jullundur Kanya Maha-Vidyalaya* (the Women's University founded by the Arya Samajists in Jullundur in the Panjab). A strong deputation headed by the founder Lala Duni Raj and some of his principal women-lieutenants, Shanno Devi (the brave Congress worker who later on suffered long terms of imprisonment for the cause), Kumari Satyabati and a few others had come over to Rangoon. They saw me and asked for my active sympathy and assistance. I organised public meetings and a reception for them and persuaded the Hindu Students' Union in Rangoon University also to arrange a reception for these educational workers. I gave them wide publicity in my paper. Their Hindi addresses, which I finished up with English summing-up made the cause popular. I remember to have opened the list of contributions with a small donation of twenty-five rupees contributed by my wife and the deputation could raise twenty-five thousand rupees in Burma. The members of the deputation became personal friends of my wife and myself ; Shanno Devi, in particular, visited us often in Calcutta after we returned from Burma in 1925. She was the Principal of the Institution : she took a vow of raising one *lakh* rupees for her pet institution by her personal efforts ; she went to South Africa and came back with a *lakh* contributed by South African Indians. Later on, I had an invitation to attend one of their convocations : I went up to Jullundur and the truly *Swadeshi* atmosphere of this educational centre, the patriotic fervour of the ladies under training, their discipline and organisation and their command of Sanskrit and Hindi were all very impressive. This was in 1931. At a later date I had occasion to see for myself Professor Karve's Women's University at Poona, which also was a successful experiment, but the atmosphere at Jullundur was more 'electrical'.

The leaders of the Arya Samaj in Burma some time later,

approached me and persuaded me to visit the Upper Burma cities of Mandalay and Maymyo—the latter is a most beautiful hill-station, full of picturesque views and literally smiling with 'flowers'—and to address public meetings in commemoration of Swami Dayanand, the founder of the Arya Samaj. I was given a big ovation in the two cities and there were very respectable gatherings to hear my addresses in English on the Arya Samaj movement and Swami Dayanand's mission. The city of Mandalay is the old capital of the Burmese kings and I paid a round of visits to the ancient palace and other sights. The town is, like all old towns, dusty and not very clean but it has a historic past and somewhere inside the fort our friend and darling Subhas Bose and my old classmate Jyotish Ghosh were then living under close British guard !

Life in Rangoon flowed rather evenly—the staff on the *Rangoon Mail* were all South Indians, from Assistant Editor, Manager, Advertisement assistant, typist to press foreman and compositors. The organ was published thrice a week and so I had some hours of respite when I could keep my many social or political or cultural engagements and I had also time to read the Indian and foreign journals. My chief delight was to read the editorials of the Lahore *Tribune* penned by Sri Kalinath Roy, who has died recently, mourned by all Indian journalists. Kalinath Roy's editorials were models of balance and sense of proportion and right perspective—sweetly reasoned yet firm, critical yet constructive, giving an unbiassed presentation of both sides of controversial topics. I here record my debt to his talent : I tried to shape my editorials somewhat after his pattern and with excellent results, for my editorials were liked, I was told, not only by the Indian clientele throughout Burma, but by the Burmese journalists (who often I may say so without pride or offence, copied my ideas and rewrote them in their journals in more or less uncertain English !) and what was more, by the higher European officials, many of whom became very friendly to me, though I never spared the Burma Government whenever they were in fault and my organ was openly an anti-imperialist sheet, which published as a regular feature cuttings from foreign and Indian journals exposing British commercial and foreign policy and administrative measures far and near. A regular feature of the paper was

the publication of a series of articles contributed by the Indian revolutionary patriot (who had fled to Japan and been naturalised as a Japanese citizen under the protective wings of Mitsuru Toyama, the venerable and powerful Head of the Black Dragon Society), Rash Behari Bose, who took a leading part in organising an Indian resistance army under Japanese inspiration during the last war and has left the land of the living, mourned by all lovers of India. It was Bose who contacted me from Tokyo and arranged with the Japanese Government for priority in mail facilities for his contributions to my paper. He sent me a portrait and a pen-picture of Mitsuru Toyama, both of which I gladly published in the *Rangoon Mail*.

One of my best friends in Rangoon was Swami Syamananda, a disciple of Ramakrishna Paramahansa Dev and a member of the Ramakrishna Mission. He was not a very learned man, nor did he pose as having fathomed the mysteries of religion, but he was an intensely practical man with large doses of 'horse-sense' and he had, almost unaided, built up a fine hospital on the outskirts of the Port of Rangoon financed by his admirers and also by the Government of Burma. It was a hospital for the poor, and the South Indian coolies and labourers, the Bengalee factory workers or the poor Marathi office clerks—all benefited by it. Swamiji had enlisted the active services of a few eminent Indian doctors and had a paid medical staff also living with him in the hospital compound. The doctor then in residence, Dr. Biswas from Nadia district became very attached to me and the family and he and the Swamiji were constant visitors at our place. The Swamiji often invited us to the hospital and we enjoyed his monkish hospitality. I placed my personal services and the prestige of my paper at the disposal of the *Ramakrishna Sevasrama*, as the hospital was called, most willingly and I am glad I could be of some service to such a laudable cause.

I had a very busy time and a very pleasant time. Rev. Ottama and Mr. Madanjit took me out to political meetings and conferences of the Burnese nationalists. The Hindu Sabha enthusiasts (we had a Hindu Sabha in Rangoon as early as 1924) made me their President. Mr. Motala, a Zerbadi Muslim and Editor of

the *Rangoon Daily News*, a moderate paper, took me to Muslim functions and to the Muslim Students Association in the University of Rangoon. The orthodox Hindus and the Brahmos invited me to their special worships and religious services and social meets. And whenever any Indian of distinction, or any European of culture arrived, I had to participate actively in organising receptions and addresses and I was expected to take some responsible part on those occasions.

Rangoon was a cosmopolitan city and what I most liked about its atmosphere was the comparative lack of racial arrogance and colour-bias, which had so pained me in the home-country. And most of the professional men of independent means and status—almost everybody—were there, as they openly confessed to me in private—to earn money and then retire to their homes in India. There were very few competent to tackle public questions or to address public meetings. Even Mr. J. R. Das, although a very successful barrister, was shy before large gatherings.

One of the first solemn and serious public meetings I was responsible for organising at the Sooneram Hall in Rangoon was a meeting of condolence for Sir Asutosh Mookerjee, whose premature and unexpected death at Patna in 1924 caused widespread grief throughout India. A most courageous, leonine personality, 'the Bengal Tiger' had left a legacy of whole-hearted and unselfish devotion to the big cause of Education, Law and Administration of Justice almost unequalled in the annals of the homeland, and the University of Calcutta specially had been nurtured by his fostering care and assiduous labour and unfaltering courage into an arsenal of nationalism and culture. As soon as the news of his death came on the wires, I considered it a public duty as well as a personal obligation to condole on his death.

Later on Rangoon was visited by the Indian Marine Commission and Mr. Jadu Nath Roy from Bengal and Mr. S. N. Haji from Bombay (of the Scindia Steam Navigation Company) were among the personnel. I met them and had them interviewed for my paper after we had had some talks in the party arranged in their honour. Miss Stella Kramrisch, Calcutta University Lecturer in Fine Arts, arrived. She saw me. Again a reception and a public

meeting had to be organised and I had to pilot it through. My friend, Dr. Beni Madhab Barua, Head of the Department of Pali in Calcutta arrived and I arranged some meetings for him and published some of his discourses on Buddhist philosophy in the *Rangoon Mail*. Dr. Barua addressed the University of Rangoon also. His lectures were very much admired.

But the most outstanding event was the arrival in Rangoon (some time in 1924) of our *Gurudeva* Rabindranath Tagore, on his way to the Federated Malay states and Java. News of his coming came over the wires. Mohit Mukherji, of the Bengal Academy, a few of the Bengali professors of colleges and few leading Burmans, Gujarati business magnates, a few of the lawyers—Mr. J. R. Das leading—and a few Chinese and Europeans and myself formed a Reception Committee. The 'poet-laureate of Asia' must be given a welcome worthy of Rangoon. I was put in charge of the entire publicity ; and the very delicate task of writing the all-party address to Tagore also devolved on me, with the proviso that the European Director of Public Instruction and Mr. Mohit Mukherji were to sit with me and alter or amend it. Funds had to be raised and there again I had to go about with the subscription list amongst big financiers and business magnates ! The *Rangoon Mail* and the *Rangoon Daily News* and the Burmese Press agencies had to be set in motion, so that by the time Tagore arrived, the reading public of Burma had some idea of what Tagore was and what he stood for. My pen was not idle and Tagore was a theme that could never have been exhausted by a Tagore-enthusiast like myself. Eventually there were three receptions—one a cosmopolitan, all-party reception held at the Town Hall (called the Jubilee Hall), the second, an all-Bengali reception at the Sooneram Hall, where I presided, and the third, a Chinese reception arranged at Kemmendine, a suburb of Rangoon, in the spacious Chinese school. The enthusiasm was tremendous, the halls everywhere were over-crowded, and Rabindranath was given ovations worthy of the great principles which he had been upholding and spreading in his inimitable style and God-like voice throughout the East and the West.

The cosmopolitan address in English written by me\* was only of

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\*Reprinted in the Bulletin (published by the *Visva-Bharati*) relating to the Tour.

40 lines : it was read by a wealthy and cultured Sino-Burman, who hardly could voice the serious gravity and tender poetry underlying it—but I was told that Rabindranath had, when told of the authorship, expressed the opinion that the address summed up within a small compass the comprehensive ideas and activities of his literary and missionary career and far surpassed in quality and virtue of condensation any other addresses received by him anywhere ! Later on when I visited Santi-Niketan early in 1926, Rathindranath Tagore, the poet's son, and a few of the ardent disciples of Tagore opened the records of the Visva-Bharati journal and showed me the address reproduced in its pages and complimented me warmly on it. I do not write this in self-laudation or in any spirit of self-advertisement but only to say that when things come out of the inner consciousness in a straight flow, they are bound to attain excellence. I felt somebody was just holding my fingers and it was a sort of automatic writing ! The things of excellence in Literature, Art and Music—even in scientific invention and discovery—partake of this quality of the 'Unconscious' and are born out of the depths of our Being and are marked by simplicity and directness of appeal.\*

Rabindranath stayed with us in Rangoon for 3 or 4 days only and privately told me that C. F. Andrews would be coming to us in Rangoon a few months after and he counted on my finding suitable accommodation for him. I could easily have put him up at my residence but I thought it better to keep him at Mr. J. R. Das's place

\*Here I may record how on occasion after occasion, when I edited the '*Servant*' of Calcutta, Sj.: Satis Chandra Mukherjee (Dawn Society) came to my place and encouraged me by saying that some of the editorials reminded him of the writings of Aurobindo Ghose in the '*Bande Mataram*' of 1907 and that they had an original savour and a poetic quality and should be reprinted. He compelled me to reprint them, Ganesh & Co., of Madras, doing the work rather slowly and some of my editorials in the '*Servant*' were reprinted under the caption 'Gandhism in Theory and Practice' in 1926. So also some of my editorials in the '*Rangoon Mail*' were reprinted in small booklets after I returned to Bengal under the captions 'Asianism and other Essays', 'The Indo-Burmese Question', 'Prophets and Patriots' dedicated respectively to the memory of C. R. Das, Rev. Ottama and Principal G. C. Bose. Rabindranath Tagore had told me in Rangoon that my English rendering of his Bengali address there (which I printed in the '*Rangoon Mail*' after receiving the poet's assent) did not smack of 'journalese'.

which, of course, had luxurious appurtenances and where he could have European dishes. I arranged a big reception for Andrews also at the Jubilee Hall, presented a public address to him (again of my writing) and showed him round. The terrible conditions of housing of labour in the city—30 people living with one or two women in a most promiscuous state in a ground floor, ill-ventilated room fit to house at the most four persons—affected C. F. Andrews deeply. I took him to the Bengal Academy and, I believe, to the university also. Andrews came to see my wife at my place and presented me with an autographed photograph of his as a memento of this visit, which I have preserved to this day. He also contributed two very interesting editorials to my paper, on race-problems and labour.\*

C. F. Andrews has been like an elder brother to me. When he visited Chittagong in 1921, he came to see my wife and mother and he took the dust of the feet of my mother in true Indian fashion—such was his courtesy and so real was his adoption of Indian ways! We together sat down to a dinner arranged at my place specially in his honour when boys of municipal scavengers also ate and J. M. Sen Gupta, some other Congress leaders and workers, Hindu and Muslim, were with us. This was my way of demonstrating by example in 1921 at Chittagong how untouchability should be buried five fathoms deep.

A true Christian was C. F. Andrews. An indissoluble link between Gandhi and Tagore, he was also one of the finest links between cultured India and cultured Britain. I have spent days with him and never found a frown or an uncharitable remark or an angry word to pass his lips. 'Charity', that universal solvent, that sweetest and gentlest of all virtues, was ingrained in him: compassion for and love of the poor, the needy, the dispossessed and the disinherited of the earth was his in abounding measure. Racial barriers—the adventitious distinctions made over a question of pigmentation of the skin (how ridiculous it seems to me and many of us!)—did not exist for him. His deep learning, his wide culture, all his resources of body and mind, he used exclusively with remarkable single-mindedness for the amelioration of the

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\* Reproduced as an Introduction to my 'Indo-Burmese Question'.

lot of the poor factory-worker and labourer everywhere and for the breaking down of national and racial barriers. His adoption of Indian food and dress and ways was not a surface show for the fostering of some ultimate ends, but something very genuine and sincere. I have seen only one other—an Englishwoman—of this quality—Miss Margaret Noble, who became Sister Nivedita of the Ramakrishna Mission and poured her life out in India's service in the glorious days of Swadeshi. She was probably the most devoted and discerning of Vivekananda's disciples, as Andrews was of Tagore and Gandhi. I have seen C. F. Andrews in the leafy shades of Santi-Niketan or closeted with Rabindranath or in his study ; I have travelled with him and long distances too ; I have seen him mixing with Indians of Congress and other ranks ; I have seen him in labour circles ; I have seen him inside the family ring ; I have seen him amongst seething, turbulent masses of excited humanity, bent on making trouble in return of trouble received : and he flashes before my mind as an angel of peace, a force for harmony and conciliation, a bridge-builder between warring ideologies and camps, never an iconoclast but always a constructor, ineffably tender, gentle and sweet, a solace and a comfort to all ! He can never be forgotten by us : he is one of the 'Immortals', a Christ-like personality, 'beating in the void his angel-wings in vain',—but was it 'in vain' really ? Let posterity answer. In these days when conciliation-talks are imminent between British and Indian leaders, Andrews would have been a tower of strength to the cause of conciliation, the failure of which would spell international disaster and possibly another holocaust !

The Government of Burma was getting nervous about the prospect of Indo-Burman unity. On top of the anti-Indian agitation, a movement for the separation of Burma from India had been launched, surely under Government patronage and support. The Burmese politicians had been split into two wings—an anti-separation group led by U. Ottama which I supported and a pro-separation group which was not yet (when I was there) fully organised. The agitation for the repeal of the capitation-tax (a relic of barbaric days) had led to big riots in Mandalay, Rev. U. Ottama and many other Burmese workers were arrested and

prosecuted and U. Ottama was sentenced to four years' hard labour. I had supported on the platform and in my organ this very reasonable agitation and tried to clarify the issues and state both the popular view and the Government view impartially. Anyway, new laws were put on the Statute Book by which undesirables could be extermened from Burma and many of my leading friends of the Rangoon Bar told me that I would be the first person to be so extermened.

In the meantime, other developments had taken place on the *Rangoon Mail*. Sir Harcourt Butler was, as I have said, a very astute Governor and when he found that Mr. J. R. Das was gradually joining us and coming imperceptibly into the nationalist fold, he appointed him a High Court Judge. He had to go out of the Board of Directors of the *Rangoon Mail* and he was replaced by a very young Gujarati. I had taken in a very able young M.A. of Calcutta—Probodh Chatterji—as my Assistant Editor shortly before Mr. Das had gone out and the new Chairman, the young Gujarati asked me to dispense with his services. Naturally it was a very uncalled for interference and I consulted Mr. J. R. Das and resigned from the paper. My friend Swami Syamananda had some talks with the new Chairman and requested me to make it up with him and rejoin the *Rangoon Mail*. I was firm. My wife was equally firm—we have always shouldered our burdens together and where principles of honour and self-respect (personal or national) were concerned, we have never temporised. Chatterji also resigned.

When news of my resignation from the *Mail* circulated through Rangoon, the Bengali community met and the leading men decided that my going away from Burma would take away an intrepid fighter for the Indian cause and that this must be prevented. Within 24 hours of my resignation, a meeting of the Bengali community in Rangoon was held and I was also there by invitation. It was resolved that a new English daily would be started with myself as Organising Editor on higher allowances than what I received from the *Mail*, a Board of Directors was elected, the office establishment of my close friend, an Insurance man, Mr. K. B. Roy Chowdhury, was placed at my disposal, and I was requested to draw up a Memo randum and Articles of Association with the help of lawyer-friends.

on the Board to start selling shares for the paper throughout Burma. This was in February of 1925 and I had to be operated upon soon after for an irritating boil. As soon as I could get on my legs, I started with my eldest boy, (who had just sat for the school-final examination of Burma from the Bengal Academy) in company of Mr. Chatterji, Chief Assistant of Burma Railways, who had a saloon at his disposal. Meanwhile, Articles of Association had been formally drawn up, I had named the organ in contemplation '*The Burma Chronicle*' and my Upper Burma tour for the sale of shares commenced in March, 1925. I visited Mandalay, Maymyo, Pyinmana, Shwebo and many other big towns, enrolling shareholders from all classes of Indians, Government servants taking the first shares. I visited Pagan, the city of pagodas in ruins extending over 100 square miles, I was told, on the Irawaddy—where Indian and Chinese, Siamese and Indonesian and Japanese styles of temple architecture stood side by side and the famous *Ananda Pagoda*, a splendid and well-preserved relic of Indian architectural influence stood in sun-kissing stateliness amidst fragments and ruins of hundreds of dilapidated pagodas. The welcome I received from the Indian community everywhere is unforgettable: everywhere there were parties in my honour and people subscribed for shares liberally.

Things were shaping fairly well for the new venture but there was a bolt from the blue. On the 17th of June, 1925, news arrived of the sudden death of C. R. Das at Darjeeling the day before. My health also had given way and the tragedy of Deshabandhu's death weighed upon my soul like lead. It suddenly came to me in a flash, as it were, that the time had come for me to throw away all my prospects in Burma and return post-haste to Bengal, where my services would be needed—C. R. Das was no more, Subhas Bose had been kept in duress in Burma along with a host of other first-rate patriots and my friends J. M. Sen Gupta and B. N. Sasmal were the only two leaders of consequence left in Bengal, with Kiron Sankar Roy, to run the Congress party machine. I had hurried consultations with my wife and friends and told just two or three people on my Board of Directors that I would be leaving presently on a mission of conferring with Gandhiji and other All-India leaders on the situation; and that I had decided not to return and '*The Burma Chronicle*' venture should

perforce be ended and all share-money (over Rs. 30,000 had been subscribed already) were to be returned to the subscribers.

I did the necessary honour to C. R. Das's memory—holding a mammoth meeting of condolence in the Town Hall and taking out mourning processions ; and then I sailed for Calcutta about the 24th of July, 1925. My wife and children followed a fortnight after.\*

Thus ended my two years' career in Burma—full of varied and delightful activities in many directions. I had, to all intents and purposes, become the spokesman of Burma Indians and people of all ranks amongst Indians came to me for advice, encouragement and ventilation and redress of their grievances. I was careful to keep away from the intrigues of the Burma branch of the Indian Congress and to keep up my independent status as a Congressman, an educationist and journalist.

My relation with all communities was most friendly. I came to know U Chit Laing, Dr. Ba Maw, U Pu and many other leading Burmese political leaders. I was very popular with the extremist monks of Burma ; they knew and acclaimed me as *Banaji* ! Even with the Government bloc of European officials, I was on terms of cordiality. The Director of Public Instruction, the Inspector-General of Police, the Commissioner of Police, the Chief Secretary, I.M.S. doctors, many of the P.W.D. engineers knew me and invited me to their functions, where my *khadi*-clad person was always a signal for courteous welcome. My wife and myself were invited by the Governor to a reception at Government House in honour of H.H. the Duke of Connaught : we sent word that we could attend only if *khaddar* dress was permitted. The Governor readily agreed and we received greater courtesy by far there than people dressed in European clothes !

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\*My eldest boy Benoyendra who stood high in the School final examination in Burma and won a first-grade Government Scholarship stayed behind as my friends Ananga Mohan Ghosh and K. B. Roy Chowdhury would not let him go and share in my uncertainties but kept him with them and eventually after a 2-year course, he passed out second in the Intermediate Examination from University College of Rangoon in 1927 and then he returned to us to study in the Presidency College, Calcutta.

The Burma episode in my life appears now in perspective as having been the most pleasant, though I remember sighing for the fertile riverine plains of Bengal while pacing the strand in Rangoon, which was very near my house in Brooking Street. In Burma, I had a free run—I gained hosts of friends and made not a single enemy. I was in the heyday of maturing years, on the right side of forty, had an organ absolutely under my control, which I could freely use for the public good and I had very great prestige, being the only man who had crossed over to Burma to serve the people and not for a career or wealth. But all this came to a sudden end only after two years—such was Destiny, which was beckoning to me across the foaming seas, for renewed work in Bengal.

## CHAPTER V

### BACK TO BENGAL : NEW CURRENTS

(1925-33)

As soon as I returned to Calcutta in July, 1925, I called on my old friend and comrade J. M. Sen Gupta on whom very soon after Deshabandhu's demise, Gandhiji had conferred the 'triple crown', i.e., the Mayoralty of Calcutta Corporation, the Leadership of the Bengal Swaraj Party and the Leadership of the Bengal Provincial Congress. Sen Gupta received me with open arms and considered my return at that stage to Bengal very timely and happy: Kiron Sankar Roy also was present at our first meeting. I was at once taken on the All-India Congress Committee and the Bengal Provincial Committee of Congress.

Events in the country were moving fast: Deshabandhu's policy and programme enunciated in the Provincial Conference over which he was fated to preside (at Faridpur) had been actively opposed. He wanted to enter into negotiations with the British Cabinet which, with Lord Birkenhead as Secretary of State for India, were showing some desire for a settlement and the left-

wingers of Bengal were not in any mood to temporise. It is quite probable that the continued incarceration of Subhas Chandra Bose and dozens of his active revolutionary followers and his own shattered health had made large inroads on Deshabandhu's dogged persistence : he felt his days were numbered and he might have been anxious for some political settlement. Anyway the Parliamentary tactics had not brought Swaraj any nearer—though the Swarajist successes in the early stages had produced a series of thrills and sensations amongst the middle-class intelligentsia and the tenure of V. J. Patel as President of the Central Assembly had been marked by very great courage and diplomatic intelligence and had created a record in the parliamentary annals of India. Patel came to be greatly feared and respected by the Delhi-Simla official coterie, who, with the Viceroy at their head, were very often at their wit's end to deal with Patel's unexpected and unforeseen stands on the constitutional plane. A party of 'responsive co-operation' had sprung up in the Swarajist camp and the movement had lost much of its old momentum and had well-nigh served its turn. Pandit Motilal Nehru was also in failing health—he was the other pillar of the Swaraj Party and, after Das's death, he must have felt lonely and unbefriended.

So when I came back to India in July, 1925, I found the Congress at a low ebb. I remember shortly after I arrived, we had a private sitting at Deshabandhu's place. Gandhiji and Mrs. Sarojini Naidu were among those present. Lord Birkenhead's 'feelers' at pacification were being considered and I pleaded with tears in my eyes for not lowering the flag on any account. Gandhiji smiled and said, "The same old mad man!" I replied truthfully "not even two years away from the Indian scene and in the langorous atmosphere of Burma could cure me of my madness!"

I went out on a tour to North Bengal towards the end of 1925.\* Some of the sittings of the Bengal Provincial Congress Committee

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\*One of my boys had been found ill of typhoid fever on board the Rangoon steamer. The serious illness of my boy at a period when I was again penniless with a large family burden was a matter of great anxiety : my younger brothers, however, were very helpful. My wife and children had been on landing been taken very cordially to the house of my younger brother's father-in-law, an

which I had attended had filled me with great misgivings about the internal discipline and strength of the Congress in Bengal and I wanted to judge for myself how the organisation was working in the districts. I visited many of the chief towns and rural centres and found the organisation had grown rusty, and was without vigour or leadership. The only place where I found some evidence of nationalist vitality was at the small town of my upbringing in my school days—Gaibandha in Rangpur district. The younger sections there had organised a library ('Tilak Library' they had named it) and a reading-room and a gymnasium of modest proportions and they were being led by a young man from outside, who at once became attached to me—Anuja Sen Gupta. I could detect that he was a member of a revolutionary group : he had very great organising ability and his hold on the young boys was marvellous. A teacher of the Government-aided school (my old school) who was

additional District Magistrate about to retire from service. My son's illness continued for about three months, after which I was free to tour Bengal and see for myself what the Congress organisation was like towards the end of 1925.

During this interval, Sir Asutosh Mookerjee's sons and myself often met at Calcutta University] and the university Professors, including Pramathanath Banerjee, who has been nominated Vice-Chancellor just recently, often had very pleasant discussions about my Burma life, Burmese politics and the future policy and programme of the Indian National Congress. Pramathanath Banerjee did not have much interior knowledge of the Congress in 1925 and one day even enquired of me what the cryptic abbreviation A.I.C.C. stood for. It was a fateful turning of the tables, when during the elections of 1936, Pramathanath signed the Congress pledge and was returned on the Congress ticket to the Bengal Assembly from the Burdwan Rural Constituency and eventually functioned as Revenue Minister for two years or more till the policy of the British Government in 1942 made him resign from the ministerial office. Congress or no Congress, Sir Asutosh's sons and son-in-law] were all ardent nationalists and they treated me in 1925 and have ever treated me with the greatest consideration. I was entered as Emeritus Professor of the Asutosh College and there was some talk of my being taken in on the Post-Graduate staff in the English Section.

It was shortly after my return from Burma that I was persuaded to contribute an article on 'Asutosh and Chittaranjan', a pen-portrait of two of the most outstanding personalities in Bengal, to the *Calcutta Review*, the organ of Calcutta University. The article was very widely appreciated and was reprinted in the columns of the *Forward*, as soon as it had appeared in the *Review*.

probably in some sort of league with the officials and the Intelligence Branch talked to me and I found Anuja was 'suspect'. So when I took him along with me in my visits to the interior villages—we jogged along in bullock-carts and had plenty of opportunity for intimate talks and exchange of views—I warned him and asked him to finish his labours at Gaibandha very speedily and pack off, otherwise he would certainly be swooped down upon by the I. B. people. I was very glad he took my advice. Later on, he was to be blown up by a bomb he had thrown at Sir Charles Tegart, the dare-devil Police Commissioner of Calcutta, practically the leading spirit of the entire All-India I.B., the man who tracked down many a revolutionary and broke up many an 'active group' and was responsible for the most unlawful raid on a group of Chittagong Armoury raiders who had taken political asylum at French Chander-nagore, in which there were casualties due to firing by Tegart's military police on the patriots, who were on French soil ! But of this later on.

I found an awful 'rot' in the rural centres of Congress. In many places the organisation had ceased to exist. In some others it was a fake and I found a local Muslim leader (who had been active on the Swaraj-cum-Khilafat front in 1921) wearing British cloth and not feeling he was doing anything anti-national ! I came back and reported matters to J. M. Sen Gupta.

In 1925, the All-India Congress Session was held at Cawnpore, with Mrs. Sarojini Naidu presiding. I spoke on the Burma situation, the other speaker being Mr. T. Prakasam from Madras, who had visited Rangoon while I was there. Burma, however, was a far cry and the All-India Congress had too many issues on the fire to be able to attend to our Indian nationals in Burma or to the urgency of the Indo-Burmese problem. Most of the delegates knew nothing about Burma and were not interested and I felt not much could be done about it.

1926 came : and we had a session of the Bengal Provincial Conference at Krishnagar—a rather poor, leaky show—Birendra Nath Sasmal presiding. Sasmal was a fine patriot but lacked in the qualities of diplomatic finesse and urbanity which J. M. Sen Gupta

so eminently possessed and he had incorporated in his presidential address paragraphs in severe condemnation of revolutionary activities which came to nothing and were forestalled by the Intelligence Branch, who had their spies amongst the revolutionary agents and which simply hampered the official Congress in its work. He had spoken the truth but the reaction was so noisy and turbulent (there were many adherents of revolutionary groups amongst the delegates) that Mrs. Naidu, who was present, and all of us together had great difficulty in bringing back harmony and peace. The session concluded its deliberations rather perfunctorily and Birendra Nath Sasmal, the hero of a hundred fights in Midnapore, one of Deshabandhu's most active lieutenants, had to retire from Congress. He took up political cases (he had defended some of the Chittagong Armoury Raid accused and had conducted the first stages of the defence of Bina Das, now a Bengal M.L.A., who had fired at the Governor in a university Convocation) and devoted himself to his High Court practice. He told me that politics had become a sorry pastime of the unscrupulous rich and that he would stage a come-back after amassing a *lakh* ! And he was true to his word. He amassed that much, built a fine house at Ballygunge, then entered the lists in the Calcutta Corporation election of 1935 and won against heavy odds. He fought the Central Assembly elections a short while after and again won, but he was struck down by apoplexy and died, full of honours, prematurely in 1936. His funeral was attended by thousands. A dogged man, he had left instructions that his body should be cremated in a sitting, erect position (even in death, he would not like to bend down but would hold his head erect as in life !) and his instructions were obeyed. Sasmal had been one of my staunchest friends and his loss was a grievous personal and political loss !

At Krishnagar while the Provincial Congress was sitting, I had been approached by both the Abhoy Asram group and the *Khadi Pratisthan* for joining in their constructive work. The *Khadi Pratisthan* had taken up and expanded my *Saraswata Asram* organisation (founded in Chittagong in 1921) which had been kept alive by my followers with the active help of Acharya P. C. Ray and the gentry of Chittagong during the years (1922-25) when circumstances compelled me to stay away from Chittagong. The Asram had been

shifted to the village of Suchia from there, and this was one of the biggest *Khadi*-producing centres in Bengal. Naturally this consideration also weighed with me in joining Satis Das Gupta. For two months I toured on a *Khadi* propaganda in many districts and other important centres, with magic lantern lecturers and salesmen. I visited Burdwan and Birbhum in West Bengal and Chittagong, Noakhali, Sylhet and many of the important trade centres in these districts. I resumed my old contacts. Everywhere the *Khadi* cause was popularised and *Khadi* in large quantities was sold but the trend of my public address, frankly aggressive and revolutionary, alarmed Satis Babu, who was then bent on constructive work only. Besides, he was and is a hundred per cent believer in the cult of non-violence and there also we disagreed and I came out of the *Khadi Pratisthan*. I now felt that it would be much better for the Congress cause if I could enter one of the bigger Bengal colleges as professor and got into direct touch with the student community of Bengal.

In June 1926, I was introduced to Principal G. C. Bose, the founder-Principal of the Bangabasi College, Calcutta by my pupil Professor Tripurari Chakravarti and we had a frank exchange of views and I was appointed one of the Senior Professors of English in his college on very honourable terms. I joined the Bangabasi College in July, 1926 and continued there for seven and a half years.

The revolutionary forces in Bengal had by this time been activated—Subhas Bose and other active leaders were again back to work. I was never inside any revolutionary organisation but my personal views as an independent Congressman not tied to any faction or party carried weight both in official Congress circles advocating open activity and in left-wing revolutionary camps which were enrolling new recruits both amongst young men and young women and getting into the Congress organisation in large numbers, so that they might control its policy and programme. From 1927 on, I found myself in great request in these circles of the young : they organised conferences in various places and took me to preside over their deliberations or to address the large congregations. I presided at a big conference at Dhubri (Assam) in October, 1927 and in company with J. M. Sen Gupta or Subhas Bose or both, I took active part in various political meetings at Faridpur, Dacca,

Chittagong, Comilla, Noakhali, Barisal, Mymensingh and throughout the big centres of North Bengal.\*

By the end of 1927, my influence amongst student and youth-organisations and amongst nationalist women groups became very pronounced and though the political rivalry between Sen Gupta and Subhas Bose made my position somewhat difficult, I managed to keep my course clear and without identifying myself with either helped both, so long as their methods or objectives appealed to me. I was a member of the Provincial Congress Executive and a member of the All-India Congress Committee ; I was in the forefront whenever risky situations arose ; my public utterances were straight from the heart and I was one of the most uncompromising critics of administrative lapses or un-British ways and I always consciously steered a middle path between non-violence and violence. The Government could never place me in any fixed category and the orthodox Gandhian groups' opinion was that I had strong revolutionary sympathies, whereas the revolutionaries openly said that I was a staunch follower of Gandhiji. The fact is, I was never a *doctrinaire* and never could bring myself to believe that men *en masse* could or ought to be shaped in rigid moulds of theory. I was often a mystery man in politics, nobody could predict which side in opposed camps I would support. That was because I think I tried to be a realist and a political free lance. In action I have always stuck to non-violence, as a matter of temperament but in theory my leanings always have been towards the use of force—disciplined and organised force—in political warfare. For, moral persuasions and loving tolerance and charity—‘returning good for evil’—might be good ethics, excellent as a standard of personal living but where the quest is for seizure

\*In July 1927, my eldest son joined the Presidency College. He and his friends organised a *Rabindra-Parishad*, where Rabindranath Tagore's admirers met within the college and a study-circle with Tagore's works as central theme flourished. Rabindranath himself spoke and recited there on occasions and was once given a grand reception. I resumed my contact with my old college, as I was always invited to the functions of the *Rabindra-Parishad* and other organisations in the college and I often addressed gatherings there. Thus an avowed anti-British rebel was enabled to preach his ideas, albeit within limits, in his old college.

of political power, one may honestly doubt if non-violent means will cut any ice in the settlement of final issues.

These have been my personal views all through my mature life and I see no reason to go back on them. And one thing more : mere demagogery and the art of blowing hot and cold alternately might be an excellent means to popularity but real leaders of the people must have 'guts' and the courage of plain speaking without prevarication.

The most heroic leaders are fashioned after the patterns of Gandhiji and Subhas Bose. These idols of the nation have never talked big—they have been always reticent in their public and private utterances but when they have decided upon a certain plan of action, they have worked it up without any turning to right or left. Of such stuff is true leadership made.

The 1926 Congress session at Gauhati was a tame affair with Srinivasa Iyengar as President. I did not attend it. In 1927, the announcement of the visit of the Simon Commission of Enquiry—an all-white Commission it was—was the signal for another upheaval. Dyarchy had been a glaring failure everywhere in India and there was hardly any need for any further Parliamentary Commission to sit for a post-mortem examination of its corpse. The Madras Session of the Congress in 1927 was the scene of revived political enthusiasm. The successful boycott of the Simon Commission by the Congress (and I had joined in the Bengal movement on this issue with zest) was a feather in its cap.

The Calcutta Session of 1928 brought matters to a head. Untoward events had happened in the course of the Simon Commission boycott agitation—Lala Lajpat Rai, the 'lion of the Punjab' and one of the top men of the All-India Congress had died of the after-effects of a lathi-blow by a police official and this act of wanton brutality had sent a thrill of horror throughout India. The younger people were getting restive and the older leaders chose to sit on the fence—'willing to wound, yet afraid to strike'. It was at this juncture that Calcutta became the venue of the Congress. I enrolled myself as a member of the Reception Committee and began to take an active part in its deliberations. The revolutionaries were on

the saddle in the Bengal organisation and they were eager that I should be pushed up to fill a prominent part in the Congress show. I was made Chairman of the Reception Committee of the Volunteers' Conference over which Subhas Chandra Bose presided. I wanted an efficient Secretary and Rames Chandra Acharyya, a revolutionary friend with a long record of suffering, was put in for the office. The members of the *Jugantar* group—who were then active on the side of Subhas Bose—were very friendly to me ; those of the *Anusilan Samity* who were behind Sen Gupta were not so demonstrative in friendliness. Many had been the skirmishes fought between the two rival groups with the two rival Bengal leaders as the centre-pieces. At a certain stage, one of the two had been kidnapped by a body of enthusiasts of the rival camp and the reply came in the kidnapping of his rival. We were getting sick of these rivalries and jealousies and knew that such frittering of resources would lead the country nowhere.

The Mayoralty of the Calcutta Corporation was another bone of contention between the rival leaders and their two groups ; Sen Gupta had had a unique record of being elected to the Mayor's office five times in succession and as control of the Calcutta Corporation meant an accession of financial and strategic power, the conflict became more and more serious and the means adopted for victory were not always free from blame.

The Calcutta Session was to be a trial of strength between the two rival Bengal groups as also between right-wing Gandhians and left-wingers throughout India. Pandit Motilal Nehru was elected President. Extensive preparations had been made for the success of the session. About two thousand volunteers had been enrolled and trained. Subhas Bose was the G. O. C. (General Officer Commanding) in splendid uniform, and many of the senior revolutionary leaders were given places under him with uniforms and badges indicative of rank ; the volunteers also were properly attired and uniformed. All this was more or less in imitation of British Army practices. Bose had done his level best to enrol a volunteer corps trained on military lines without arms.\*

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\*J. M. Sen Gupta was the President of the Reception Committee of the Congress session and Dr. Bidhan Chandra Roy and Nalini Ranjan Sarker organised

The reception given to the President-elect, Pandit Motilal Nehru, was grandiose : volunteers in military formation (with bands playing) led by uniformed commanding officers escorted him from Howrah station to the Congress Pandal and I remember to have accompanied this procession and paraded all the way on foot. The streets were lined with enormously big crowds and the balconies of Burrabazar, College Street, Lower Circular Road in all its stretches presented the spectacle of ladies blowing conch-shells and throwing flowers. The procession must have taken at least 3 hours to reach its destination to the gate of the Park Circus Congress Pandal.

The issue dominating this Congress was Independence vs. Dominion Status. Gandhiji with his entire entourage and following was present and Bengal delegates were in constant session, discussing the dominating issue threadbare.

I listened to the viewpoints expressed by individual Congressmen as well as groups without declaring myself. The revolutionary sections of young men and women counted upon my support of 'independence'. J. M. Sen Gupta and his group would be, it was known, voting for Dominion Status (under Gandhiji's lead) and the Boseites led by Subhas Bose and Jawaharlal Nehru would be for Independence. The Nehrus, father and son, would be in opposite lobbies, as regards this crucial question.

The leaders, province by province, spoke and Gandhiji gave out his views in his clear and appealing Hindusthani. Votes were taken and tellers were appointed in an atmosphere of tense expectation. The extremist youthful sections of Bengal were very much upset over my voting in favour of 'Dominion Status'. The Dominion Status-wallas obtained a very decided majority.

I remember how some young men came up to me in the Congress Pandal after the voting and were very clamorous. I had to tell them that I never voted against my convictions and I was sure in my

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the Pandal and sitting arrangement and the Industrial Exhibition. But the real control was Subhas Bose's.

Before this the India Independence League had been formed under Jawaharlal Nehru's inspiration, and many of us enthusiastically joined, but when the time came for giving a shape to the League in Bengal, Subhas could put his men in controlling positions.

mind that the country was not yet organised for implementing a resolution of independence outside the British Commonwealth. They might snap their fingers at me, shout at me and misunderstand me altogether but I was not to be intimidated into any kind of activity or give a wrong lead simply to win evanescent popularity.

The expectations of youth had, however, been pitched high, so far as I was concerned, by my address on the condolence resolution at the death of Lala Lajpat Rai occasioned by police brutality. Sardar Sardul Singh Caveesher (of the Punjab), who has come so much into the lime-light as one of the principal lieutenants of Subhas Chandra Bose in recent years, was to move the resolution and my friend J. M. Sen Gupta sprang a surprise on me by a last minute request that I was to be the seconder. Well, I had to comply ; some months earlier, I had had to face prosecution before the Chief Presidency Magistrate of Calcutta on account of sedition *re.* the Lalaji incident (I was found guilty but only 'admonished' by Mr. Roxburgh, the Magistrate) and probably Sen Gupta considered that I was in full possession of facts.

Anyway, I did not elaborate any facts or details—they were too well-known—but I declared straight from the Congress platform, attended by at least one lakh of people, that 'if this sort of killing of leaders by Government agents continued, our *Congress volunteers, if and when the Congress so ordered, would not only know how to die but also to kill !*' The sheer bravado of this declaration took almost every Congress leader and 'high-brow' visitors by surprise; and the house listened to my 10-minute cryptic address, which hit out straight, in tense silence.\*

There was apprehension of a big labour-rally breaking into the Congress (wild rumours were afloat) and some leaders were for closing the gates of the pandal against labour demonstrators ; some were even for phoning up the Police Commissioner. Jawaharlal and

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\*When I came back to my place on the dais, Patel and Rajagopalachari exclaimed : "So, you no longer believe in non-violence, Professor Banerjee ?" and I retorted at once : "Well, for the matter of that, nobody in Bengal does ! We have given you 8 long years since 1920 and what have you achieved up-to-date by your prescription ?" That gave them a measure of any Bengal leader of opinion worth his salt !

myself lined up and decided to throw the gates open and receive the rally with cordiality. Everything passed off smoothly and nothing untoward happened. And really, it is want of imagination and lack of the saving grace of tolerance and sympathy for the 'other' party that breeds trouble and turns the 'other party' into an enemy. This is what is happening today in '46, by the constant propaganda (often quite uncalled for and unnecessary) against the Communists, the Royists and the Hindu Mahasabha by certain sections of Congressmen with very uncanny and sinister results. The enemies do not get killed—organisationally speaking—at all. If there is truth and courage and honesty in their ranks, if they serve any popular needs, say, of the factory and the field workers, about whose interests the Congress appears to advertise its keen sympathy and prospective support (after freedom\* has been won, forsooth!) these parties can never be liquidated by bastinadoing and burning of their offices and breaking of heads: rather they receive greater advertisement and a bigger measure of public sympathy. And as a Congressman, I have personally never been afraid or shy of the Red Flag and the hammer and sickle emblems. To betray such nervousness is to point at some weakness in the Congress organisation itself!

An All-India Youth Congress was also organised during the Calcutta Congress session.\* Mr. K. F. Nariman presided and the address delivered by Subhas Bose, Chairman of the Reception Committee, was very trenchant. The direct attack he made on the 'escapist' who got away from the dust and heat and strife of the work-a-day world and settled down in *Ashramas* for a so-called religious and spiritual life 'above the clouds' created, I remember, a great sensation. Bose had mentioned Pondicherry, the asylum of Sri Aurobindo, and the avowed adherents or disciples or sympathisers of such institutions naturally took offence. But honestly speaking, I also have cherished the same opinions. Of what good is spiritual fulfilment (whatever the phrase means—I could always understand the implications of fullest self-realisation or self-expansion of an individual but the

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\*The constitution was drawn up by Yusuf Meherally of Bombay, my son Benoyendranath, Professor N. G. Bhattacharyya of the Scottish Church College and myself.

exact connotation of 'spiritual' has ever remained a mystery to me? Does spirituality mean starving of the normal and vital impulses and emotional urges of the mind or the soul? Does it stand for an enforced isolation of the individual from his compatriots with the object of personal fulfilment divorced from human fulfilment 'in the widest commonalty spread'? Does it mean a super-imposed ban on the natural desire for beauty, the natural yearning after art and music, the very natural urge for innocent enjoyments and diversions, shutting out the sun and the moon and the stars and an absorption in the dark, unlit, uncharted regions of the misty world of mysticism? I have asked these questions to myself and never found a satisfactory answer. I, for one, am for treading the highways of human effort, walking through blood and sweat and enjoying clean delights and shining joys. This retiring into your shell like a tortoise has never appealed to me. Of course, tastes differ, it takes all sorts to make God's world. So live and let live—let this be our motto.

One of the moving spirits of the Youth Congress was Yusuf Meherally. An alerter, brisker young man I have hardly come across. Generous and high-spirited, aristocratic in his habits of mind and cultural leanings, yet a democrat of democrats, respectful to elders and seniors, always ready to do a good turn to anybody seeking assistance, hospitable to a fault, it was no wonder that Yusuf Meherally attracted notice and commanded wide influence in the Bombay City and Presidency and rose to be its youngest Mayor! He wields a facile pen and speaks like a sharp-shooter, hitting straight out. He has been like a son to me during these years and I have cherished an abiding fondness for him. He is now one of the leaders of the Congress Socialists. He is keeping himself a little aloof from political eddies and back-washes at present, but I have not the slightest doubt that as soon as his health improves a little he will stage a come-back at the right moment and lead many a cause and push into the front many a forlorn hope! I met him later at Tripuri Congress and at Bombay for short periods and how he received me, overjoyed and obliging!

The reactions of Gandhiji to the semi-military dispositions of

Subhas Bose at Calcutta were not very happy, nor very happily expressed. Gandhiji sensed the imminent revolt of young Bengal against the codified leading-strings of apostles of the cult of non-violence carried *ad nauseum* into regions where it was of doubtful application or feasibility : he might have also sensed the growing prestige and influence of Bose amongst youth all over India. And no wonder that Subhas began to cast his spell all about him. He was so sedate and self-controlled, so far above softnesses of any description, sexually pure beyond the cavil of his blackest enemies, gentle, unassuming—and yet hard as a rock when principles demanded hardness—dogged, persistent, determined—should I say it ?—even to a fault, generous, friendly, tolerant. His life from a boy has been one continuous *Sadhana* and dedication to one and only one idea—the Freedom of India, ‘Azad Hind’ ; and people who have criticised him and his ways in the bungling mazes of the Calcutta Corporation or in the broader twisted passages of the Congress organisation have known only the outside and never penetrated into the holy of holies—the dedicated sanctuary of a noble soul. Subhas has been a realist of realists : he has never tied himself down to a simple formula or a rigid doctrine. So he has advanced slowly but with sure and firm steps on his path—the path which only free souls baptised in the founts of revolutionary zeal and trained for any sacrifice for the cause can tread !

Gandhiji is great beyond compare but he is by heredity and subsequent experience a *Vaishnava*—attuned to charity and forgiving tolerance and stuck fast on the bed-rocks of *ahimsa* and interpreting the Gita and the *Shastras* in the light of this basic concept. The vast majority of us, the political intelligentsia, were by heredity and training worshippers of the cult of *Sakti* which includes *Prem* and *kindliness* and *charity*, but knows how to transcend them when Duty calls. In fact, like Godhead, transcending Being and non-Being and yet comprehending both, *Sakti* transcends non-violence and violence and is a cult of inclusion and not of exclusion ; and to this school of the *Sakti* cult Subhas belongs and an overwhelming Bengal majority also.

Gandhiji had been rather curt and unkind in his criticism of the Calcutta Session of the Congress. He dubbed it as a ‘circus’ and

practically belittled the semi-military outfit of the Congress volunteers built up through the vicissitudes of the intervening years, till 18 years after, the nucleus of the Indian National Army has come to stay and grow in power and strength.

As I have already hinted, behind the backs of all of us, using the Congress as a 'smoke screen', the revolutionary groups were merging, coalescing, disrupting, throwing out new formations and athwart the two groups—the *Jugantar* and the *Anusilan* parties, which by the machinations of the British Intelligence Service had always been kept apart and made to fight each other—other groups had been forming and organising—in Chittagong, Comilla, Dacca, Barisal, Mymensingh, Faridpur, Noakhali, Midnapore and in lesser measure in every other district in Bengal. These were destined to be the spear-head of new movements, and later to branch out into Congress Socialists, Communists, Royists, Bengal Volunteers, the Revolutionary Socialist Party, the Bolshevik Party of India etc., etc. I am not speaking here from 'interior' knowledge but by guess and hearsay and intelligent inference. I think, however, that my analysis is, broadly speaking, a correct picture of the developments. And thus, Gandhiji, with all his moderation, has had to be on the alert and launch wide-scale movements of civil resistance to stave off armed insurrections to be staged by impatient 'gun-men' without discipline and preparation.

From 1929, Bengal began its march on the war-path : conference after conference, propaganda-meetings, big rallies of students and women were the order of the day. My life in '29 was quite a hectic one. I was being taken from centre to centre—now by myself, now in the company of Subhas Bose or J. M. Sen Gupta or of both though the two were drifting apart. We were in the colleges, the hostels, the University, in the labour areas—in fact, young Bengal had launched a very wide agitation.

In 1929, a very important conference was held in Naria (Dr. Sures Banerji's native village) in the district of Faridpur, with J. M. Sen Gupta as President. The leading organiser was Dr. Sures Banerji. I took a prominent part in the Conference. The Conference was attended by many Muslims on whom Dr. Banerji exercised great

influence,\* and their presence ensured the support of thousands of Muslims to the Congress cause.

It was while sitting by the side of J. M. Sen Gupta at this Conference that I received a wire from Kiran Sankar Roy, Secretary of the Bengal Provincial Congress Committee, requesting my assent to the proposal of my presiding at the ensuing Dacca District Conference to be held at Manikganj (a subdivisional centre of Dacca). I consulted Sen Gupta, who urged me to agree and I agreed. I have always shunned these honours and I really felt shy of accepting the offer. The previous President had been no less a personage than Deshabandhu Das and I considered it a great honour to be chosen his successor.

I went back to Calcutta and prepared my address (as a matter of course, in Bengali), the keynote of which was the urgency of harmonising different political groups—Khadi, Parliamentary, labour, students, women—with a view to pooling all available manpower for the revolution that was coming. The receptions given me from the steamer station of Aricha to Manikganj town (a distance

\*Dr. Banerji and myself became great friends since our companionship in Alipur Jail in 1921 : he always told me I had looked upon him during these days with brotherly care and I became a very close associate of the Abhoy Ashram group led by Dr. Banerji which had its central headquarters near Comilla town on a plot of about 100 bighas in which were an agricultural farm, a khadi producing plant with looms and charkas, a dyeing department, a medical relief section and a small hospital (this was in charge of Dr. Nripendra Nath Bose, a most efficient physician in demand throughout the town and the district of Tipperah and one of the leading members of the Ashram) and a chemical research laboratory where Dr. Prafulla Ghosh worked on the investigation of new processes of dyeing and allied problems. There was also a library and a reading room.

Another fairly big centre of the Abhoy Ashram was at Malikanda (Dr. Prafulla Ghosh's native village) on the river Padma, which I often visited and where one of the principal workers was my old pupil Mihirlal Chatterji who conducted a modest national school : here also gradually came into existence, besides the khadi-producing organisation, a small medical relief centre ; many Muslim gentlemen-farmers and peasants of the surrounding villages, including the Muslim population of the *char-land* opposite, were supporters of the Malikanda Ashram.

of about 18 miles) were very flattering : arches and lecture-platforms had been set up in at least 8 or 10 places, where I had to halt, receive floral tributes and address a few words to the assembled audience.

The Conference gave a lead to the volunteer movement in Bengal and my last act was to present a Congress flag to the youthful section of the Conference and exhort them to uphold its honour and, if needed, to die for it, in which exhortation I was ably assisted by my friend Pratul Chandra Ganguli, the *Anusilan* party boss.

Bipin Chandra Pal had been specially invited to this Conference to address on a literary topic—I believe it was *Vaishnava Literature*. His political prestige had declined considerably by 1929 ; he had grown too conservative and opinionated with advancing years and he could never comprehend the practical and moral implications of Gandhiji's non-violent non-co-operation and *Satyagraha*. Rather, he was actively anti-Gandhi : but I received him with all honour and introduced him as our political *Guru*, who had, more than any other single person, fired our imaginations and led us to heroic deeds in 1905.

Then, after my return, began a friendly tussle with Subhas Bose with regard to the Presidency of the imminent Provincial Conference, the venue of which was Rangpur. Now, I had been an old boy of the Rangpur district and a long-standing college professor of wide popularity at Rajshahi and so I had influence in North Bengal. Professor Jyotish Ghosh, myself and Subhas Bose were in the running. Jyotish and myself had a private conference joined by Bepin Behari Ganguly and other leaders about this and we entered into an agreement by which Jyotish Ghosh was to retire from the contest in my favour and I was to be run by the entire group. The pact, however, was not honoured later and so there was a three-cornered contest and the result was that Suhhas Bose got the majority of votes and was elected President. Acharyya P. C. Ray and Sarat Chandra Chatterji (the novelist) were amongst those present in this session of the Provincial Conference.

Gandhiji was to have hoisted the national flag. Since he could not come, the reception committee chose me to perform that very solemn duty.

Subhas Bose, J. M. Sen Gupta and myself were given a tremendous ovation when we reached Rangpur railway station : a specially trained volunteer corps with bands took us along defined routes to the Congress Pandal at a distance of over two miles from the station and the routes were lined with thousands. The leading organisers were some of the senior leaders of the 1905 movement which had been so strong at Rangpur. The Conference was a big success, from the viewpoints of organisation and propaganda.

I took a big part in the Rangpur Conference and moved or seconded several important resolutions. There was a conference of Bengali banks and loan-offices which had been hard hit and which were receiving no assistance from the Government to tide over their difficulties. Acharyya P. C. Ray presided, and I was one of the principal speakers and pointed out how the big managers of many of these offices were political sufferers and Congressmen and how the Government knew that *crores* of the hard-earned money of the middle-classes were in these banks and one could hardly escape the inference that the Government was deliberately following this policy of aloofness to pauperise the politically active middle classes of Bengal. And I believe I was right.

A more significant rally in which I had to take a very prominent part was at Chittagong. By 1929, J. M. Sen Gupta's popularity was somewhat on the wane in his own home district, for Chittagong was unmistakably a revolutionary centre. Three distinct yet co-ordinated conferences had been organised—the Political Conference where Subhas Bose presided, the Youth Conference where the President was Professor Jyotish Ghosh, and the Students' Conference, where I had been asked to take the Chair. There was tremendous enthusiasm. And there were also some clashes, attended with the breaking of a few heads, between two rival revolutionary organisations but this was smoothed up. J. M. Sen Gupta was with us but he was not very much in the front. Nur Ahmed, the nationalist Chairman of the Chittagong Municipality, raised the Congress flag and Subhas Bose was given an address by the municipality.

The real organisers of this rally were the members of the young group who later on were to show their hands at the daring raid on

the Chittagong Armoury—Ananta Singh, Ganesh Ghose (this one my old Chittagong College pupil) and Lokenath Bal. Suryya Sen, the leader, played no prominent part openly in this series of conferences and kept himself in the background. He was then the *Free Press* reporter in Chittagong.

Professor Jyotish Ghosh was 'spirited away' i.e. put under arrest, immediately after the Youth Conference was over, from the open conference pandal, by the police and taken away to Chinsura to stand trial on certain charges. This was nothing like a new experience to Jyotish, who has been spending the major portion of his life (he is sixty-one now) in jails, in detention-camps, in internment and externment, and has been subjected to relentless and continuous persecutions by the bureaucracy. He is, at the fag-end of his life, a member of the Bengal Assembly on the Congress ticket. All honour to such a man, the modestest, the most self-controlled and the most self-effacing patriot-revolutionary that Bengal has produced in our generation and also one of the most cultured !

My impromptu speech in the Students' Conference was a big success. I was careful to read the signs of the times and lined my address with romance and idealism, showing extreme and inflammatory political sidelights. Lokenath Bal was Chairman of the Reception Committee and his tall figure and dignified bearing made a great appeal.

I expatiated on the natural beauties of Chittagong, of the wizardry exercised on the romantic and sensuous imagination by its sea-views and hills and jungle expanses and by the silver streaks of the river *Karnaphuli*: I brought into the fore Chittagong's historic past of heroic doings and I descended, giving my fancy a free rein, on the future possibilities of the development of Chittagong as a maritime and a naval centre and as a rail-head connecting Bengal and Burma through the tracts of Assam.

I spent a few days at Chittagong in a bungalow on the river, as the guest of my friend Rai Bahadur Upendra Lal Roy, the business magnate. The wind-swept site of this bungalow, only five or six miles away from the open bay was very invigorating and refreshing and the days sped, till there was a diversion in the shape of a river-trip

to Satkania, where the groups who were in opposition to the organisers of the Political Conference had arranged their own meeting. As I was an independent Congressman I readily accepted their invitation to preside. Here resolutions supporting 'independence' as opposed to Dominion Status for India were passed, the senior Congressmen opposing. I was the guest of my old pupil Sailen Chowdhury's parents and was received with very great warmth and regard. The party comprised of about 30 souls shared two big boats with the Congress flag flying in front, and the trip took quite a good many hours, Satkania being about 25 or 30 miles distant from Chittagong. It is on the Chittagong-Arakan road, and there was discernible amongst both the *Bhadralok* classes and the peasantry, a distinct trace of Arakanese mixture of blood.

The Bengal Government also were not idle. They launched against me as many as five prosecutions on charges of sedition—three at Calcutta and Alipur, one at Jessore, and one at Dacca.

I have forgotten many of the incidents and the details have clean vanished out of memory but the broad outlines I can recall.

One of the prosecutions arose out of a speech I had made at Hazra Park in South Calcutta, shortly after the memorial celebrations held annually for C. R. Das on June 16. The Commissioner of Police had issued an order that processions on the occasion of Deshabandhu's death anniversary would be permitted but nobody would be allowed to carry any sticks or *lathis*. The Congress leaders of Calcutta held the anniversary, but obliged the Police Commissioner (Sir Charles Tegart) by strict obedience to the ban imposed on lathi-bearing. I had occasion to speak at Hazra Park soon after and I roundly condemned the Congress organisers for this supineness: there was no apprehension of any riots or breach of the peace in any shape or form and what was the sense of cowering before the 'Head Constable of Calcutta' in a matter of arranging of procession meant to honour that arch-rebel Deshabandhu?

The speech had an immediate effect. The Congress Committees of Calcutta hard-pressed by the young workers had to organise a big demonstration with Congress flags and *lathis*, attended by the

Congress Secretaries of each district. Of course, I was prosecuted and many of the leaders of the processionists, inclusive of Kiran Sankar Roy, J. M. Das Gupta, Paritosh Banerji, were also prosecuted—I, for sedition, they for having led an unlawful procession.

The defence I put up was my own concoction—though my friend B. N. Sasmal was my counsel. It was something to this effect: I had found fault with the Bengal Provincial Congress Committee and the District Congress leadership for more or less compromising behaviour. There was no criticism of the Government. The B.P.C.C. was not yet the Government of the country and how could it be sedition when criticism had been levelled at them, the opposition party to the Government Bloc? Not exactly in these words, but on these lines.

Of course, my plea was not accepted and I was given one year's r.i. Simultaneously I was prosecuted on two other counts for sedition before Mr. Roxburgh, the Chief Presidency Magistrate. Again one year's r.i.—but these sentences were to run concurrently with the previous sentence.

The Jessore prosecution arose out of a big district conference that had been summoned at Kalia, a village of highly educated but factious gentlemen, mostly loyalists or high-placed Government servants. All the 'big-wigs' of the Bengal Congress were there—Subhas Bose, Jyotish Ghosh and a host of old revolutionary leaders, Miss Jyotirmoyee Ganguly and myself. Subhas and myself were billeted together in the house of an absentee Burdwan advocate; the others were lodged in the school-house.

I was asked to speak: and I spoke somewhat in this fashion: 'I want you to be honest and follow a straight course. I have among my pupils who are inhabitants of this village two high-ranking servants of the Government, one an Accountant-General, another a High Court Judge. I am fond of them: they are honest men. But they are of no use to us. If you want to serve the country along the lines of the Congress—well, you could have no better example than that of Subhas Bose, who is presiding here. If you mean to wrest Swaraj by fighting, you have a shining and glorious example of a hero

who died fighting—Jatin Mukherji.' Jatin Mukherji was the very same patriot who years before had died fighting the military and the police at Balasore (Orissa).

I had been to Jalpaiguri with J. M. Sen Gupta and Santosh Kumar Basu, who later rose to be Mayor of Calcutta and a Minister of the Bengal Government. I had always a penchant for suddenly, though deliberately, flying off the rails and putting in not very direct, yet quite plain, appeals for resistance by arms when necessary. My friend Sen Gupta used to be sometimes alarmed at these outbursts : I had to tell him they came straight out of the depths of my nature and could not be thwarted and I must have some of my steam off !

Here also I had spoken about Jatin Mukherji. When the case came up for hearing before Mr. Larkin, the Jessore District Magistrate and a nice gentleman (I was conveyed from Calcutta—my bail bonds had been cancelled and I was already a prisoner at Alipur Central Jail—by Mr. Sabine, the Jessore Superintendent of Police, who was very respectful and courteous beyond measure—almost brotherly in his behaviour) my advocate, Rai Bahadur Jadu Nath Majumder, raised the plea that there was no evidence to support that this Jatin Mukherji was the same Jatin who had died fighting Government forces at Balasore—and the Government had to send to Orissa for the records of Jatin Mukherji and a special police officer came with the records and gave evidence.

This time (November 1929) I had experience of a District Jail. The Jessore Jail accommodated about 300 prisoners : it was a rather dismal place and I was, I believe, at that particular moment, the only political prisoner. Special arrangements were made for my meals and other comforts—the Superintendent of Police, Mr. Sabine, must have issued special instructions—and the Bengali Jailor was rather nervous before me. I was given for an attendant a hardened but very useful and clever convict with a long-term sentence and he entertained me with all manner of silly stories about his thievings and betrayals of trust. He was a rogue and a rascal but he was very good to me and serviceable.

The trial dragged on for about a fortnight : I was sentenced to

six months' hard labour (concurrent) and the Magistrate Mr. Larkin treated me in a very friendly way and laughingly said : 'Mr. Roxburgh has given you a concurrent sentence of a year's hard labour : I sentence you to 6 months' r.i. concurrent which means only a technical sentence !'

Somehow, I received far more genial and courteous and respectful treatment from European I.C.S. men. The Indian Magistrates raised from the Provincial cadre) behaved either sheepishly when confronted with rebels like us (they felt very ill at ease ! ) or tried to be assertive. But as they were mostly bullies (and bullies are always cowards), their arrogance paled directly we showed them a little bit of 'bite' ! I had occasion to tell an English Magistrate when he came to visit me in the Central Jail, Alipur, that under *Swaraj*, we would employ men of his training and character,—for being from a free country, they had a full sense of responsibility and were very efficient. He must have winced a bit, but he took the compliment graciously, for it was a compliment that I had meant !

It was at the Kalia Conference that I met the patriot-lady who was to be very dear to the whole family and for whom subsequently we had to proceed against Sir Charles Tegart, the Police Commissioner, in the High Court of Calcutta and with success.

The lady is Suhashini Ganguly who belongs to Khulna and was educated at school and college at Dacca. Her record in the country's service has been gloriously daring—daring beyond compare—and she has, in all, put in about nine years in detention. She is known in youthful patriot-circles as *Mejdi* and there are hundreds of young women and young men who look to her for guidance and help in distress, and she gives it, ungrudgingly and without the least thought of self. For the Cause she has risked her life, even her womanly reputation—which she held cheap—if she could be of any service to a group of young lads who were absconders from justice, having been involved in the Chittagong Armoury Raid and had drifted to French Chandernagore in small batches, eluding the Bengal I. B, and had taken asylum at a house situated in French territory, where under the usages of international law, non-French Governments and their agents had no right of seizure or arrest, far less of brigandage and shooting down of political refugees.

It was to give these patriots asylum that Suhashini had volunteered to go up to French Chandernagore, take a house in conjunction with a revolutionary of the purest character and highest antecedents, resign a lucrative job in a Calcutta School, and take a school-mistress's job at Chandernagore on a small pay. Having arranged a house where she was mistress, she had taken these brave boys as guests. All this happened while I was in jail in 1930.

The Chittagong Armoury Raid had occurred in April 1930, when Sen Gupta and myself were both in jail at Alipur. We got the news inside the jail through the columns of a smuggled sheet of the *Statesman* of Calcutta and some of our friends in jail were 'stunned'. Not so myself. I told my friends that right or wrong—whether they failed or succeeded in bringing matters to a head and getting this 'action' followed by other actions—the Bengal Revolutionaries had shown their hand and proved their mettle once for all. Of course, it took the force of the Government four years of pitched fights, constant shadowings of the entire young population by the police, laying the entire district of Chittagong under embargo and a sort of military administration of checks and counter-checks, of widespread intimidation and oppression to haul up most of the offenders and to lay hold on the leader, Suryya Kumar Sen, who died fighting Government forces when betrayed and surprised.\*

The Intelligence Branch had got scent of these Chittagong boys for some time and were conspiring with the obliging French Police to hunt them. One night, Sir Charles Tegart like a brigand, took out a military police force with him and raided the house (with the connivance of the French), shot down one of the lads, manhandled all others. Sir Charles the belted knight went to the length of slapping a lady! These have been the ways of marauders and the Indian Police have acted no better.

At this distance of time, it appears to me that it was the daring and reckless quality of my addresses, delivered impromptu, that made me so popular in those days of upheaval. In a slave country,

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\*My entry into the district was banned from 1931 to 1945 : it was only at the termination of World-War II that I could re-enter Chittagong, so dear to me and my people—here are the last remains of my respected father and here I sacrificed and fought for my country's freedom years ago.

men live mechanical lives in well-defined 'ruts', personality is lost and so if and when a man shows some personality, some courage of conviction, some amount of fearlessness, he is apt to be made much of. There have been occasions when men have spoken in highly eulogistic terms of the little sacrifice I made for the Cause in 1921 ; they characterised it as indicative of 'greatness' ; and I have told them in reply that the measure of the country's depressed state may be taken by the 'greatness' ascribed to some little act of personal sacrifice for a really big Cause. In other words, people think lightly of laying down their lives for the maintenance of freedom and that is why *they* are so powerful and *we* are so weak !

The last incident, which created a lot of excitement in Dacca and my subdivisional town of Munshiganj, was my fight for the right of free entry of the so-called 'untouchable' castes into Hindu temples. There was such a temple raised by public funds in the small town of Munshiganj ; and men and women of the Namasudra and other 'low-caste' communities could not get facilities for worship inside the temple. I am not sure, but they were probably debarred from entering the temple compound even ! I considered this a great blot on the higher castes. They predominated as lawyers, teachers, businessmen. They controlled the temple and they kept out Hindus—men of the Hindu faith, their own faith ! It was preposterous. I held a meeting attended by a hundred or two hundred Namasudras and it was a propaganda meeting for the Congress and I used the platform to tell these Namasudras that formerly their ancestors were fighters and soldiers and now they had forgotten the old traditions and were treated as untouchables. I asked them to join the Congress in large numbers, for the Congress was fighting for the eradication of untouchability in any form and if they would come in a disciplined and non-violent manner (without any weapons of offence, not even *lathis*) to offer worship to the presiding deity of the temple on the *Astami Day* of the Durga Puja, I would myself with other Congressmen lead them. There was an influential Namasudra Congressman from Dacca present in the meeting and he also fell in with my programme.

I reached Munshiganj town on the specified day in the morning. All arrangements had been made ; free meals were being served to

the men coming from long distances and the local Congress-leaders—Jiban Lal Chatterjee and Surendra Majumdar, both ex-revolutionaries who had suffered imprisonment, internment and exterrnent—were in attendance with their workers. The whole town was in a ferment. The orthodox Hindus, some of them leading members of the local Bar, were in opposition : they conferred with the Sub-divisional Magistrate and persuaded him to believe that a breach of the peace was apprehended. I found the District Magistrate, Mr. Martyn, and an Asst. Superintendent of Police, also an Englishman, with a posse of constables had come up. The Subdivisional Magistrate, a young Bengali I.C.S.—was very respectful and requested me to leave the town and stop the movement and send away the Namasudra contingent. I told him it was not possible : then he contrived to make me meet the English Magistrate who asked me why I was there from Calcutta. I had to tell him that it was my place of nativity and my object was to earn some elementary rights of worship denied to a large section of Hindus of my district. I retorted by asking him why he was there. He told me that he was there to keep the peace and ensure that there were no disturbances. I had to tell him he represented the British *Raj* of usurpation and I represented the Indian Congress—out to establish a People's *Raj*. He said it was yet years before such a dream could be realised : I told him we expected it to materialise in ten years' time, by 1939 ! He told me politely to leave for Calcutta : I had to tell him firmly I had first to see this business of the day through and further, there would be no disturbances, unless, of course, his police created it ! The Magistrate must have left instructions for my arrest and detention in prison before he left.

By three o'clock, our dispositions had been made. I had selected a room on the open road leading to the temple for our office, whence instructions were to be issued and Press publicity also was to be conducted. I gave definite instructions to every one of the men to march in batches of four with only offerings of flowers in their hands and try to enter the temple compound and assert non-violently their rights as Hindu worshippers. Swami Satyananda of the Hindu Mission with a few workers was also with our party.

The first group of four had just reached near the gates of the temple when they found their way barred by the police: their hands were broken by *lathi*-blows inflicted by the guardians of law and order: the same treatment was meted out to the second batch and the third batch. I had their wounds bandaged and arranged for the taking of photographs of the injured men. I was dictating a message for the Press to one of my lieutenants when I was put under arrest along with Suren Majumdar and both of us were marched to the temple compound and presented before the sub-divisional Magistrate. It was about 5-30 p.m.: the jail would not receive prisoners after 6 p.m. and the Magistrate was willing to grant us bail, if offered, to the tune of Rs. 6,000 for each. The place was small and nobody was ready with such a large amount at short notice. So to the sub-jail we two were marched by evening. We spent a miserable night together, pestered by mosquitoes and bugs and had not a wink of sleep. Next morning, I sent a communication to the S.D.O. (he was the Superintendent of the Jail also)—his bungalow, an old fort of Moghul times, was practically adjacent to the sub-jail—and asked for ordinary amenities usually granted to prisoners of our status: two cots, mosquito-nets, clean beds, diet to which we were accustomed, facilities for bath, facilities for interviewing lawyers and relations and friends. He came to see me: he was quite willing to grant me all facilities but was not ready to treat my comrade Majumder in the same manner. I said I would not, on any account, accept any preferential treatment: he must give both of us the same privilege and facilities or deny them impartially to both. Then he thought better of it and arranged the amenities to which we were entitled. We had our food from outside, supplied by friends. When my eldest boy accompanied by my wife and children and my aged mother came to interview me, the S.D.O. was very courteous to them all and had me taken to his bungalow where I met them all.

The sub-jail was a small place and meant for ordinary criminals. It had accommodation for about 20 people. It had an oil-press for men sentenced to hard labour. The jail warders openly fraternised with the convicts and undertrials. We were objects of special interest to all the prisoners and warders. I met one undertrial who

was a notorious dacoit and receiver of stolen property of the Munshiganj area close to my village home and who had received previous sentences. He did not mind his jail-life at all. He was used to it and as soon as he would be freed he would again captain his team of thieves and dacoits. In fact, the police of the *thanas* (police stations) and the village *chowkidars* are mostly in collusion with these 'professionals' and they often carry on their nefarious trade without let or hindrance, so long as they share the booty. During years of scarcity and famine these degradations increase and if there is some unrest due to political causes, then also these human sharks do not fail to take advantage of the general situation of slackness. So long as there will be venal and corrupt police officers, the rot will continue.

The *Sanatanists* looked exceedingly foolish and they became very unpopular when I was jailed—and attempts were made to set me free by legal pressures. The S.D.O. was not at all unwilling—he was an old Presidency College boy and when he faced my boy who had just graduated with very high honours from the same college, he must have felt very small. I was a Presidency College man—pupil and professor both—and there is always a moral and intellectual link between the *alumni* of the same educational institution ! I was presented before the Second Executive Officer after a few days and my cousin, a High Court advocate, came to defend me. I was being let off, when the Intelligence Branch agents intervened, and I was sent back to the jail again. I spent a short period in the jail and then was sent under police escort to take my trial elsewhere.

So I found myself in jail for the second time by the end of 1929. I was lodged in Alipur Central Jail again. I was one of the first prominent Congressmen in Bengal to be jailed in 1929.

I had not been a month in jail when we were startled by news of the attempt of revolutionaries to blow up the Viceroy and his train. The Viceroy escaped by a narrow margin ; one or two of the bogies suffered damage. About the same time, political negotiations were speeded up between leading non-Congress politicians and the Government of India, to which the Congress also was invited. The attempt on the Viceroy's life was not permitted to deflect the course of these negotiations. The assurances asked for by the Congress from

the Government as a preliminary measure were not forthcoming and the Congress ceased to be a party to these negotiations.

And shortly after, by the beginning of 1930, Gandhiji launched his Civil Disobedience Campaign with the breaking of the 'Salt Law', the most inequitable tax on the consumption of salt, the poorest man's necessity, which had been condemned year after year by all nationalist groups without result ; and the famous Dandi March began. The march of Gandhiji with his following of sixty on foot through rural areas developed electrically into a great mass-rebellion. The Bengal leaders also began their campaign. The clash on 26th January (Independence Day), 1930, between the police forces of the Government of Bengal led by Sir Charles Tegart and the leaders of the Bengal Congress came to a head with the brutal assault made by Tegart's men on the then Mayor of Calcutta, Subhas Chandra Bose, (and also on the Corporation Education Officer, Kshitish Prosad Chattopadhyaya, graduate of an English university, a fine anthropological scholar of repute and a descendant of Pandit Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar) as he was returning after hoisting the Congress flag on the Corporation buildings. He and others were placed under arrest and sentenced to various terms of imprisonment. J. M. Sen Gupta and many others soon filled the jail.

The Salt *Satyagraha* in Bengal had been launched by Satis Chandra Das Gupta in 24-Parganas near his Sodepur Asram of the *Khadi-Pratisthan*, with a determined and truly non-violent group of young men and women. Probhat Mohan Banerji,—poet, artist, and non-co-operator—was one of the principal workers. The police tried all manner of brutalities on the group but in vain : heads were broken, limbs fractured, salt-pans snatched and there were jailings galore and yet the movement gathered strength throughout the province. Amongst the most intrepid leaders of the Salt and Civil Disobedience Campaign were Dr. Sures Chandra Banerji (of the *Abhoy Asram*) and Dr. Protap Chandra Guha Roy. They took up Gandhiji's method and roused millions in selected areas in Midnapore and other districts to rebellion. Satis Babu, Dr. Banerji, Dr. Guha Roy, Amarendranath Chattopadhyaya, Jnananjan Neogi, Dr. J. M. Das Gupta, Kiran Sankar Roy and men from various districts began to flock into the Central Jail and we were soon a

very strong contingent. Satya Bhusan Gupta, Satya Ranjan Bakshi, Dhiren Mookerji (of South Calcutta) also came in. Two Sikh patriots soon joined me in my ward—Sardar Balwant Sing Granthi (an ex-religious preacher attached to a Sikh regiment) and a very young lad Prem Sing Prem.

We were soon so powerful inside the jail (there were 'undertrials', coming in and going out for taking their trials, who carried our messages outside and kept the public and the Press informed of all jail-happenings) that I managed with the help of Satya Gupta to make up a Congress flag and this was hoisted on a bamboo pole in my yard by Prem Sing Prem, the Sikh boy who was absolutely unafraid and ready for anything. Many of my friends amongst the front rank leaders asked me to pull it down (for it was a direct defiance of authority and inside jail one was supposed to be 'civilly dead' and had no rights *ipso facto* of freedom of speech or action or association) but Prem Sing was not willing to oblige the leaders and I did not Press him. The Inspector-General of Prisons was to visit us next morning and a sergeant spoke to me about the flag and I told him straight he might pull it down and dishonour the Congress, but I was not going to oblige him and he left. Nothing happened—the Inspector-General, one Englishman, came and talked to us and went away. The flag was fluttering gaily in the sun and he simply ignored it. He was a clever official and did not like creating trouble. My object had been accomplished and next day the flag was sent out of the jail through an undertrial—I believe. Satya Bhusan Gupta. Gupta is one of the most fearless organisers of youth in Bengal—sweet in manner and hard as a rock in fundamentals ; he is from East Bengal and an M.A. in History.

In April occurred the Chittagong Armoury Raid which put the whole of Bengal in high excitement and communicated waves of revolutionary fervour to the rest of India. This *coup* was so daring and so well-organised and came as so sudden a surprise that the Government was caught 'napping' and there would have been a rising with arms, all over Bengal at least, had the revolutionaries been of one mind and had they succeeded in following this incident up with other incidents.

As it was, when we received the news the whole body of political

prisoners was thrown into strange and diversely opposed moods. I was exultant, for I had always admired heroic actions ; J. M. Sen Gupta could not at once make up his mind about it ; Subhas Bose held his counsel, though he was one to be most delighted and many of the orthodox Gandhites, who had no revolutionary imagination but could be trusted to follow Gandhiji's non-violent programme with zeal and devotion, were simply 'horrified'.

With the armoury raid incident precipitated by a section of the Chittagong revolutionary group headed by Suryya Kumar Sen, one of the 'silentest' of revolutionaries that have come in my way—and therefore so formidable and so heroic—began a new chapter of revolutionary activities. The capture of the rebels (many of them had been shot down by British military forces in a fight on the Jalalabad hill, several miles away from Chittagong, some had been wounded and arrested) and their trial took about four years. These four years were years of terrible suffering for the Hindu middle and upper classes in the district—they were 'suspect' to a man and even women were not free from interrogation and suspicion. Some of the unapprehended rebels 'staged' dramatic sorties into European and Anglo-Indian clubs and associations and a young lady came very much into the lime-light in those days—Kalpana Dutt\* ; later a leading member of the Communist Party.

In the meantime, the civil disobedience movement had spread through entire India ; all the Congress leaders with their following in all provinces had been shut up and the revolutionary groups were also showing their hand. A body of Socialists inspired by M. N. Roy were active. Matters were coming to a head. The first Round Table Conference had produced hardly any results. The Viceroy, Lord Irwin, summoned Gandhiji and entered into the Gandhi-Irwin Pact, by which certain facilities with regard to the manufacture of salt by the common people were given, jailed Congressmen were released, repressive laws withdrawn and Gandhiji, as the sole representative of the Congress joined the Round Table Conference. Ramsay Macdonald was then Prime Minister. Gandhiji was almost successful in evolving a formula of placating the Muslim leaders

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\*I remember her as the recipient of a special prize in the debating contest held along with the Students' Conference in Chittagong in 1929.

about representation in legislatures and other controversial Hindu-Muslim problems, when the British Tory imperialists hatched an Anglo-Muslim pact behind Gandhiji's back, in a sense 'double-crossed' him, and later evolved the infamous 'Communal Award' and 'special electorates', by which India was divided into religious and communal camps and the fate of India in her march by peaceful means and negotiations was sealed for a generation. Gandhiji returned 'empty-handed' to India, though his concluding address at the Round Table Conference will always rank as one of the greatest and most honest addresses in history.

In the Alipur Central Jail, however, we had been living a very peaceful life in honourable co-operation with the jail authorities when things happened, disturbing greatly the even tenor of our lives and leading to very strained relations. In co-operation with the Jail Superintendent, a Mr. Some Dutt, of the Punjab and a member of the I. M. S., who was pulling on harmoniously with us all, I had worked out a proposal for the teaching of ordinary convict boys which had been supported by many of my comrades in the jail and which received the willing consent of the Member-in-charge of Jails, Sir Provas Chandra Mitter. Superintendent Dutt asked me if Sir Provas knew me, for he had no sooner seen my draft and signature than he had gladly given official assent. I told the Superintendent laughingly that all the Indian members of the Government knew me personally or by reputation, as I had been a college professor in Government service for many years and as I had been taking a prominent part in the movements of the Congress Opposition since 1921. That clinched the matter and primers and slates and pencils, pen and paper were supplied to the convict boys and about 8 or 10 of us (Subhas Bose also accompanied the group of teachers once or twice) commenced teaching in a big room set apart for the purpose. The classes were in the morning. Naturally, we inculcated our patriotic ideas and taught the boys about Gandhi and other leaders when putting them through the alphabets or in the course of spelling lessons ; we taught a bit of elementary history and arithmetic also. The spies in the jail must have brought all this aspect of our teaching and the episode about the history of the Congress flag and other small incidents to the

notice of the Government. For, suddenly the Superintendent turned round, closed our jail school and put one of our gentlest comrades who occupied the cell next to mine in my ward—the Sikh 'Granthi' (Priest) Sardar Balwant Singh—into a 'punishment cell' (meant for very refractory and rebellious prisoners). The reason given was that Sardarji had pelted a sergeant and warders with 'brickbats' from our yard. This was most unbelievably false, a 'canard' and none of us were taken in by it. We hurriedly conferred and it was decided that the Superintendent was to be notified that unless Sardarji was at once restored to his ward and cell, we, as a body, would refuse to be locked up in the evening. Some Dutt had been an army I.M.S. and had no idea of the solidarity of Congressmen, nor of the influence and prestige of most of the patriots who were under his care, nor of Bengal politics. He got irritated beyond measure, had the *Pagla-ghanti* (danger-alarm) sounded and came up to us, accompanied by all his sergeants and a large posse of jail warders with *lathis* and began to speak most insultingly, forgetting that amongst the prisoners were the Mayor, i. e., the First Citizen of Calcutta and many of very high social status in the country. He called upon us rudely to go back to our cells and said he would not tolerate any sort of 'mutiny'.

I had to tell him that he should not forget himself, specially before the Mayor of Calcutta and he should behave like a gentleman and in a manner worthy of his own status. This made him all the more angry and he ordered the warders to beat us; well, I had personal control over many of them—almost every one knew and respected me as the *Mastar Mahasaya*—and I told them in a whisper just to obey orders and brandish their *lathis* in the air. I also instructed them after some minutes (for we were not going to allow ourselves to be shot or wounded and so we did not mean to resist for long—but to offer a 'token' resistance for the time being and devise other measures afterwards) to carry me in their arms to my cell. That would be a general signal for others to go back to their respective cells. I asked J. M. Sen Gupta to desist (we had shown our resistance up to a certain point, to exceed which would be risky, without any resultant benefit to anybody) and advise all to retire. Everybody fell in with my suggestions except one, and that was the leader, Subhas Bose, who, with all his gentleness, had the bull-dog

tenacity, and whose anger had been thoroughly roused by the rude and coarse behaviour of the Jail Superintendent who, be it said to our shame, was an Indian ! Bose refused to budge an inch from where he was standing. One or two sergeants came up and pushed him and he fell on the pavement and had some sort of a concussion and was senseless for a while.

By this time, we were all locked up in our cells (it was about 11 P.M.). Only five or ten minutes after, a sergeant and a warder unlocked my cell and marched me to the punishment cell where my comrade, the Sikh Sardar, had been put the day before.

Then began a series of conflicts between our group and the authorities. I 'hunger-struck' by way of protest and was induced by my comrades, Amarendranath Chattopadhyaya and Jnananjan Neogi, to take *sarbet* twice daily. The European jailor was very nice and he told me he would lock me up for only an hour in the morning and after evening, only when the Superintendent would come on inspection. I was in the punishment cell, my Sikh friend and myself were excellent company and the few other criminal-convicts under punishment gave me so much of service and ministered to me so lovingly that the punishment cell became for me quite a delightful abode. I complained against the Superintendent (through him !) to the Member-in-charge of Jails and the District Magistrate of Alipur and put in writing my honest version of the jail incidents, from start to finish and suggested that the Superintendent had proved quite unworthy of the responsibilities imposed on him and should be replaced by a more tactful and courteous official.

When the Superintendent came on his rounds every morning, I simply sat in my cell with my back turned : that was my way of showing my extreme annoyance at his behaviour. The man had suddenly made a *volte face*, changed his ways from a friendly officer to a hectoring and blustering bully—he forgot in his unbalanced state of mind that he was dealing not with a pack of common sepoys of the Army (tied hand and foot by Army regulations) but with the entire batch of Congress leaders in Bengal.

The conflict went on. I was visited by the District Magistrate, an English gentleman, who requested me to make it up with the Jail

Superintendent. I told him he had behaved most rudely with me and the entire group including J. M. Sen Gupta and Subhas Bose and that I, a college professor of long-standing, could not have truck any longer with such a man ; he had besmirched the jail administration. I asked the District Magistrate to recommend to the Government his immediate transfer and replacement by a decent man, an Englishman if possible, for Englishmen, I told him, were much more tactful and efficient and had much greater initiative than the average Indian 'slave' of the Government, as I had known and seen throughout my career. He went away : I was induced to break my fast on false pretences. The medical officer of the jail, alarmed by my growing weakness after four days' fast, told me that my representations had been favourably considered and I was to be restored to my comrades in the political wards. What was my surprise ! when next morning I was told to be ready to go out on transfer to Dacca Central Jail. Well, I had to go. At the jail office, I was greeted by a Sub-Inspector of Police from Alipur, who saluted me as an old pupil and told me he had volunteered to escort me—his old teacher—when an officer was being requisitioned for the purpose. With an old pupil as escort, I had a very pleasant journey *via* Goalundo and Narayanganj (at the latter place, my cousin, a leading doctor and Congressman of the place, and several Congressmen garlanded me and presented fruits etc.) to Dacca Jail.

My friend Professor Jyotish Ghosh had been transferred to Dacca Jail some time before from Alipur and it was very pleasant for us old friends since 1902, to be again sharing a common asylum in jail. The European Superintendent of Dacca Jail, Mr. Leonard, was very nice. He saw my prisoners' ticket marked 'red' at several places ; I smilingly assured him I was not so 'red'—I was quite 'white'—and he promised to be nice. Shortly after, the officiating jail doctor (Chief Medical Officer) turned up and he happened to be my old friend Captain Pratulpati Ganguly late of the I.M.S. war service, and later on he was replaced by the permanent incumbent, Dr. Satis Chandra Ghose, an old Chittagong friend. So matters progressed well. The District Magistrate of Dacca was then young Mr. Holland, I. C. S., the son of an English missionary 'at home'. He saw me and I explained in full to him what actually had transpired

at the Alipur Jail and he became a friend at once. He used to visit us (we two were the only Class I prisoners there at Dacca) off and on and we had very pleasant 'chats' together. Mr. Leonard, the Superintendent, brought up half-a-dozen books of English fiction which I contrived to read up in course of the week and then he replaced them—from the Library of the European Club of Dacca.

Soon after I arrived at Dacca Jail, the entire city was in the throes of a horrible Hindu-Muslim riot which was responsible for burnings and loots, murders and grievous wounds inflicted on dozens of both Muslims and Hindus and for a general unsettlement of the normal life of the city—aggravated by sudden panic and panicky rumours. This was towards the middle of 1930 and was the occasion for a strong indictment of the British rule by the poet Rabindranath Tagore. The riots and their after-math continued for over six weeks or more and we got news of day-to-day incidents from officials of the jail. Such is the company that keeps on visiting terms with and gives information to European district officers that one day Mr. Holland told me that he had been told that Maulana Abul Kalam Azad had come to Dacca during the riots, had collected a good deal of money for relief to distressed families and had decamped with the money to Calcutta ! I had to assure him that it was an arrant lie and that his informant must have been a very low-type individual to have spread such a lie about a man respected for his patriotism and integrity all over India ! I further regretted that honest administration all over India was being jeopardised by such false informers, who paid court to district officials and bred trouble and put them on the wrong scent. Mr. Holland was a young officer and this probably was his first district : he listened to me with great courtesy and did not repeat such canard a second time.

Then very tragic things happened. I have already said that the Bengal revolutionaries—the younger recruits evidently, men and women—had commenced 'operations'. The annual visit of the Bengal Governor to Dacca was the occasion and the opportunity. The Inspector-General of Police, Mr. Lowman, was an old, tried and pushful police officer who in his days had shot down, tracked and rounded up many a Bengal revolutionary and 'terrorist'. He had

come with the Governor and when the latter and his suite were visiting the Dacca Mitford School and Hospital, somebody put a bullet into Mr. Lowman's body, killing him instantaneously and also grievously wounded Mr. Hodson, the European Police Superintendent of Dacca. The wonder is that the assailant managed to escape in full daylight and was never apprehended. Rumours connected a Dacca medical student with this tragedy but the curtain will never be raised over the mystery. It was sometime in August, 1930.

We heard of the tragedy that very afternoon. The next morning the Jail Superintendent, Mr. Leonard, came to see us, very flurried : he told us it would not be possible in future for him to talk to us. We should inform him of our needs by correspondence. We asked him why. 'Well', he replied, 'your men have killed my two best friends'. I told him that we had heard of the tragedy and as gentlemen we were both of us very, very sorry indeed ! As for our men having killed any Englishman, we reminded him that we were of the Congress, disciples of Gandhiji, and such killings were no part of our policy or creed or programme. He was still unconvinced of the sincerity of our regret and then I blustered out, 'As for killings, may I ask you a simple question ? How many of *our* men have been killed by your men, since the days of the Sepoy Mutiny ?' He had no reply to give and soon after he thought better of it and re-established the old contact. But he could not regain his old complacency nor his old composure.

There was not much of commotion so far as our life in Dacca Jail was concerned—we were kept absolutely segregated from other prisoners. We had our own kitchen and baths and our own compound. We had weekly interviews—my cousin, the physician of Narayanganj, came most often to see me and my boys from Calcutta came occasionally.

Now and then one or two political prisoners from Dacca with brief sentences joined us. The rest of the district political prisoners numbering a hundred or two were kept apart from us and we practically could get no news of them. It was some time after that, a short paragraph in a Bengali news-sheet (*The Sanjibani*) which was

*officially* provided to us told me that Suhashini Ganguly had been arrested at Chandernagore and was in jail, awaiting trial.

Suhashini had accompanied me to many Congress rallies and my friend Jyotish Ghosh had seen her in some of them. He enquired if it was the same lady : I told him I was afraid it was she. I got very much worried about her and the visit of a boy of mine from Calcutta confirmed my worst misgivings. Yes, it was their 'auntie' that had been so arrested. I got some details of the Tegart raid from my boy. Soon my days were out, my jail term was over and I was released from Dacca Jail by November 1930.

I started immediately for Calcutta and my boys who had been telegraphically informed met me some where near Naihati and I was told Suhashini had been given bail, my eldest boy standing security (he was an M. A. student then) and I would meet her at our place directly I reached our Calcutta residence which was then at Bipradas Street in Garpar (north Calcutta).

So the revolutionary and the Congressman met after nearly one year !—So long as I was at Alipur, Suhashini had seen me with other lady-friends and relations periodically at the jail. She was a free woman, in charge of the Girls' Section of the Deaf and Dumb School, near my place. For some months, she had been living with my wife at our residence, as she had resigned her job as Superintendent of the Girls' Section of the Hostel, (as a result of some difference with the Principal) a post she held in addition to her teaching job.

But soon after my being jailed, she had gone out on her self-immolating mission—a humanitarian mission it certainly had been, worthy of a sister of mercy, for she went to save precious heroic young lives who were now proclaimed 'outlaws'—to French Chandernagore.

The first thing I did was to get her an appointment at the Corporation of Calcutta Girls' Section of Education. Subhas Bose was then Mayor and he at once gave her the appointment. He asked me where the lady was living after being bailed out. I said, 'Where else but in my place ?' Bose bowed his head down in compliment—for I say this without pride that it required some courage to shelter

n one's house a lady who was under trial for having harboured absconders from justice of the type of the armoury raiders !

The rescue of Suhashini from the clutches of the police became my principal duty for some time. The younger section of Chandernagore patriots (Chandernagore from the beginning of the Swadeshi days has been great in the fight for freedom and many of the first batch of Bengal revolutionaries—Charuchandra Roy, Upendranath Banerji, Barin Ghosh, Kanai Lal Dutt—were either of this place or had their training or found asylum there in French territory) rallied round us and set about to move the French Governor of Pondicherry to right this wrong and to put in a strong diplomatic protest to the Government of India about this unauthorised raid by British Indian Police inside French territory and to set Suhashini free—also to release the young man who had been her ally. And at this end, complaint was made to the High Court of Calcutta against Sir Charles Tegart, charging him with murder, illegal arrest and breach of the right of asylum for political offenders in non-British territory. The lawyer who took up the case for Suhashini and prepared the plaint and fought the case out before a Special Bench of the High Court Judges was my cousin, Advocate Jitendra Chandra Banerji. His plaint in a sense succeeded, as Suhashini was released (the Government had to drop her like a hot cake) and Sir Charles Tegart soon after had to ship himself off to England.

Meanwhile, Suhashini had as many as seven police spies watching her for day and night and following her in their sinister and serpentine way wherever she went ; and my family had five more or less grown-up boys of my own and two brothers who made up the seven that watched over her safety. Soon afterwards she was arrested under the Bengal Ordinance and spent another long term in jail.

In 1930, independence had been declared as the immediate goal of the Congress on the banks of the Ravi at Lahore with Jawaharlal as Congress President. The All-India Session of the Congress met at Karachi at the fag end of 1931. I attended this session and my lawyer-cousin also accompanied me. We had 1,000 copies of a brief statement of Suhashini's case and the illegalities and murder

committed by the Calcutta Commissioner of Police printed for circulation amongst the delegates. This was done, but my efforts at raising the question in the open Congress or in the Subjects Committee did not meet with success. Most Congressmen did not fall in with my views that the Congress need never support or launch any programme of armed resistance (mis-called 'violence')—violence is a word with a bad odour reminiscent of hooliganism and armed resistance of a disciplined character to usurping authority could never be called violence) but should record its protest against unlawful ways of suppressing violence by greater violence and assist even patriots of the 'resistance by arms' school when they were prosecuted. But the wheel has now turned and it is some solace for me to find the Congress leading the defence of the I.N.A. heroes, Shah Nawaz, Dhillon and Sehgal, and threatening the Government in Great Britain and India with dire consequences if the patriotic I.N.A. men are unjustly punished against the wishes of the Indian people. At Karachi I had to content myself by placing the papers with Gandhiji.

It was at the Karachi Congress that I first saw Khan Abdul Gaffar Khan and the N. W. Frontier 'Red Shirts'. They had just come into the picture of the Freedom movement and they lent 'colour' to the session,

The Karachi Congress session was a very well-attended one and the fundamental rights of Indian citizen in a Free State of India were drawn up here under Jawaharlal's inspiration. The allowances of Government Ministers were fixed at a maximum of Rs. 500. This did not satisfy many. The late Mr. Satyamurti, I remember, requested me to move an amendment to the effect that these should be fixed at Rs. 1000 and I had to tell him that the College where I was serving then (the Bangabasi College of Calcutta) paid me a monthly allowance of about Rs. 400 and I managed with that; and why should a Congress Minister not be able to manage with five hundred ?

At Karachi, I met Mr. Ghosh, the famous Bengali physician of Peshawar, an ardent Congressman who had a very big practice and popularity much beyond Peshawar, even amongst the trans-border Pathans, and he invited me to Peshawar. We were three (my cousin, myself and Dr. Ghosh) and we visited Amritsar, where we saw the

Golden Temple, and met several prominent Sikh leaders, Master Tara Singh amongst them, and visited Jalianwalabagh. Then we went up to Lahore and stayed for a day and a half looking up the university, visiting known Bengali professors, and enjoying the sight of the Shalimar Gardens and we visited Ranjit Singh's *Samadhi* and a few other antiquities.

Then we left for Peshawar and the city, with its high walls and colossal gates and its buildings with loop-holes for firing shots and of a design unseen before, impressed us a good deal. Everything of Peshawar smacked to us of novelty. In fact it was more akin to Central Asia than India. The *bazars*, the shops, the sturdy, *turbaned* men and the healthy women, even Dr. Ghosh's rented house which looked much more like a small fortified place than a cultured doctor's residence, the gardens of grapes and pears—the general atmosphere and the alert habits of the manly, fine-looking Pathans—were sources of real pleasure! We visited Kohat. We were going to the Khyber Pass by train and had barely passed the Islamia College Station, when, finding me examining an Afridi rifle (it was mere curiosity) on the station platform, a policeman came to us, politely asked us where we were bound for, and on our stating that it was the Khyber Pass, he asked us if we had any permits from the Deputy Commissioner. When we told him we had none and were not aware that permits would be necessary, the policeman asked us to get down and took us to an officer of the rank of a Sub-Deputy Collector in Bengal, to whom we presented our cards and told him that we were Dr. Ghosh's guests at Peshawar, where we had come simply for a pleasure trip from the Karachi Congress. The officer was very courteous but he said that he had no authority to let us proceed to the Khyber Pass and we must go back to Dr. Ghosh's. He called a *tonga* and arranged with the *tongawalla* for our transport back (about 7 miles).

We got up with our belongings on the *tonga*, and we had not proceeded very far before we were overtaken by two other *tongas*, on one of which was a very distinguished-looking Pathan gentleman, evidently a *rajs*, equipped with four rifles, and on the other his retinue of two or three armed Pathans. The gentleman drew alongside of our *tonga* and soon knew who we were : we told him all about

us and we were told in return that he was a 'Khan', i.e., a member of the aristocracy living in the trans-border area. The Khan took me on his *tonga* and after preliminary conversations, he told me how in 1930, Peshawar Cantonment was saved narrowly from being occupied by Pathan 'Red Shirts', also how 80 Pathans had fallen non-violently in the streets of Peshawar, riddled by British bullets; and eventually enquired if I could arrange to supply him with munitions, cartridges and bullets. Of guns and rifles they had plenty. They manufactured these themselves, but they were short of munitions. Such was the reputation of Bengal in 1930 as a great centre of revolution that this intelligent 'Khan' thought me also to be a gun-man and one competent to put him in the way of getting cartridges and bullets for his guns! I smilingly told him that though there were some arms and munitions in Bengal, they were all secretly stowed by revolutionaries and we had hardly any knowledge of them. At last, after a good, hearty exchange of views and compliments, we separated just when we were in sight of Peshawar railway station. It was mid-day, we had had enough of trouble for our morning and we sent word to Dr. Ghosh that we were leaving by the next train for Calcutta, telling him what had happened to us. Thus ended a very interesting and somewhat eventful journey and we came back to Calcutta.

It was soon after that one fine morning we had news in the Press of the shootings at the detention camp at Hijli (in Midnapur, near Kharagpur) with one of the prisoners—Santosh Mitter—killed and a few more wounded by the military guards. I left for Hijli at once from Howrah, where I found Subhas Bose already in the train and a little later my friend—the rival leader—J. M. Sen Gupta arrived and got into another compartment. I was the link between the two and I managed somehow to tow them both. We were joined by Kumar Devendra Lal Khan of the Narajole *Raj*, a staunch Congress-man who belonged to Subhas Bose's group. We went up to Hijli and were permitted to go inside and meet the detenus. The body of the martyr Santosh Mitter was handed to us, the English Magistrate (shot dead, alas! by a revolutionary later on; his predecessor had also been shot dead before him) doffing his hat like a gentleman. The body was brought to Calcutta in a special

train, the route from Howrah to Wellington Square (near which was Mitter's family residence) was one sea of human heads and we cremated the body with full honours !

Shortly prior to this had occurred the historic self-immolation at Lahore Jail of my pupil at the Bangabasi College, Jatin Das (a comrade of Bhagat Singh and others, he had been) by hunger strike. That was a personal wrench which all India shared. Jatin Das was the MacSwinney of India. His body was brought to Howrah by a special train. We all were there and the streets were lined with *lakhs* of citizens as when, I am told, C. R. Das's body was carried in procession to the cremation-ground. After the cremation I remember to have made a fiery speech, exhorting the youth of Bengal to avenge this martyr's death.

I also visited Vikrampur.\* It was in October 1931, when I had been to Narayanganj, that I met Professor Bimala Mohan Ganguly, formerly a Professor of English at the Ananda Mohan College, Mymensingh. After resigning from that appointment in 1921, he joined the National College, Bombay, as a Professor of English. A very active Congressman, he later became Secretary of the Vikrampur Rashtriya Samiti which controlled the Munshiganj sub-division in Dacca district. He arranged a series of propaganda meetings—11 or 12 in all—throughout his area and we together covered the programme in the course of a fortnight. These meetings had propaganda value and carried the message of the Congress to far-off village people.

Towards the latter part of 1931 Chittagong witnessed another devastating political tragedy and its aftermath. A senior Police Inspector who had been hard on the heels of the revolutionaries and

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\* Previously in 1921 and later in 1923 (before I went to Rangoon) as Secretary of the Board of National Education under the Bengal Congress, I toured a good deal in my home area in Vikrampur. The national school and weaving and spinning centre at the native village of Dhires Chandra Chakravarti (one of the most intrepid of Congress workers in Bengal, who died prematurely after putting in a good deal of work in the national cause, his last great work was the organisation of the Anti-Communal Award Bloc in Bengal as Secretary) was a very efficient institution run under heavy odds by Dhires Chakravarti and Chapala Kanta Bhattacharya, now Editor of the *Ananda Bazar Patrika*. This centre I often visited. Most of these schools collapsed, however, with the decline of the Congress movement.

had been rather ruthless in his ways, was marked out for victimisation and he was killed by a young revolutionary in broad daylight firing a revolver at him when there was a football match going on in the broad play-grounds of the city, near to where many Europeans and Anglo-Indians of the Railway Service had their bungalows. He was followed and, after some exchange of shots, captured. He was a young student, the son of a Brahmin Pundit living in a remote village of the district, a bright lad whom I met the other day after his release, at a party given by my eldest son to Chittagong convicts back from the Andamans. Soon after, by way of reprisal, the boy's village home was set on fire and his parents and village people oppressed. What was more, the District Magistrate, a Mr. Kemp, an English I.C.S., is reported to have aided and abetted the police by way of teaching the Chittagong Hindus a lesson, in having the majority of Hindu shops in the city's bazars looted by bands of Muslim hooligans.

News of this reached us in Calcutta and Sen Gupta's first idea was that it was a communal fracas but very soon a group of Chittagong comrades came and apprised us of the real facts. We convened a public meeting in Albert Hall, where the conduct of the Chittagong officials was severely condemned and a Congress Committee of Enquiry was elected, with J. M. Sen Gupta, N. C. Sen, B. N. Sasmal, Dr. J. M. Das Gupta, Afsaruddin Ahmed Chowdhury and myself as members, with a mandate to make exhaustive enquiries on the spot in the town and villages and to record evidence and submit a report and take any other necessary action.

The Chittagong comrades meanwhile were active in providing relief and preparing evidence. When our Enquiry Committee reached Chittagong, we found preliminaries ready. We began to record evidence in the town *bazar*, from shop-owners and merchants, from local gentry, from eye-witnesses. We, as a formality, sent a written note to the District authorities, to tender evidence in their possession, if they desired. It was a foregone conclusion that they would keep away and take every measure to white-wash their criminal doings.

We went into the village of the revolutionary lad and found his house mostly burnt down : we gave what consolation we could to the distressed parents.